

FROM MUNICH TO DANZIG

*By the same author*

SARAJEVO

A STUDY IN THE ORIGINS OF THE GREAT WAR (1926)

DISRAELI, GLADSTONE AND THE

EASTERN QUESTION (1935)

BRITAIN IN EUROPE 1789-1914

A SURVEY OF FOREIGN POLICY (1937)

BRITAIN AND THE DICTATORS

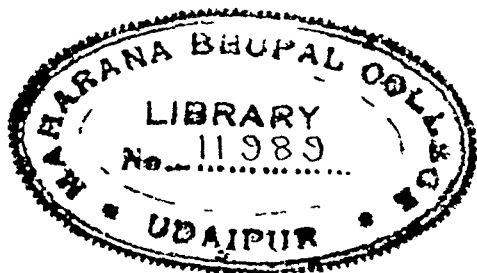
A SURVEY OF POST-WAR BRITISH POLICY (1938)

# FROM MUNICH TO DANZIG

Being the third edition, revised and  
much enlarged, of  
'MUNICH AND THE DICTATORS'

*by*

R. W. SETON-WATSON



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TO  
"THIS BENEŠ"  
WHO TRUSTED  
THE GOOD FAITH OF AN ALLY  
AND  
THE GOOD WILL OF A FRIEND

'I too believe before God, that when the storms of wrath have passed, to thee shall return the rule over thine own things, O Czech people!'—COMENIUS, 1625

'We restored our State in the name of democratic freedom, and we shall be able to preserve it through freedom increasingly perfected.'—MASARYK, 1919

'I believe in the perennial strength of our people, in its energy, toughness, and endurance, above all in its faith in those ideals of humanity, freedom, and justice, for which it has so often fought and suffered and by which it has always conquered'—BENEŠ, 1938

PRAVDA VÍTĚZI

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VERITAS VINCIT

## PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION

THE main purpose of this little volume was to provide a reasoned account of the crisis leading up to the so-called 'settlement' of Munich, and to adduce grounds for doubting its permanence, despite the Prime Minister's belief that it had brought peace in our time, and the Führer's still more optimistic view that National Socialism is to last for 1,000 years.

Under the stress of a lightning series of events in Europe, the same Government which had reversed its foreign policy in February 1938 with such disastrous results, now found it once more necessary to reverse the engines and go full speed astern, while one of the most subservient majorities in our history acclaimed the extreme beauty of the Emperor's clothes.

I have not found it necessary to make many corrections in the text as originally published, for those who criticized it adversely concentrated on opinions rather than facts. I may be allowed to add that the main lines of policy advocated in Chapter IV are in all essentials those to which the Government to-day stands committed. But the period of the Prague *coup* and the three months that followed were so crowded with events momentous for all Europe, that two lengthy new chapters had to be added to this third edition.

My object has been to provide a succinct narrative of these events, embodying wherever possible the views of rival statesmen, but not attempting to sum up a situation which is obviously still in flux. It ends with Lord Halifax's great speech at Chatham House, which to many came as a breath of fresh air

after endless noncommittal platitudes and understatements. Whether its unanimous endorsement by all parties and groups will have convinced the Dictators that Britain is at last in earnest, still remains to be seen.

In the first edition I quoted from a weighty article by Mr. Hamilton Fish Armstrong in *Foreign Affairs*. Since then it has appeared in book form under the title *When There is No Peace*. This is most earnestly commended to the reader's attention, together with *Lost Liberty?*, by Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Griffin.

R. W. SETON-WATSON

4 August, 1939

While this edition was already in the Press, the danger of war in Europe has been greatly increased by the renewed German threat to Danzig, and by the theatrical conclusion of a Russo-German Pact. The welcome firmness of the British Government has rallied the whole nation in support of its declared policy of opposition to 'attempts to alter the map of Europe by constant appeals to force'. Mr. Greenwood was speaking for millions *outside* as well as inside his own party, when he told the House of Commons on 24 August, that despite their many disagreements with the Government, they would give it their unreserved support if the present policy came to be implemented. 'Unity on that issue will be complete, and the issue will be faced with confidence and fortitude.'

R. W. S.-W.

27 August, 1939

## PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

RELUCTANTLY, but quite inevitably, I must preface this book by a personal explanation. My War experiences drove me in the post-War years to a detailed study of British foreign policy—both of its actual conduct and of its underlying principles, and the result was a book entitled *Britain in Europe, 1789-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1937). But while the finishing touches were being put to this book, events followed their relentless course, and I was led on to publish a sequel, *Britain and the Dictators* (Cambridge University Press, May 1938), surveying our post-War policy and its relations to the three great dictatorial systems of Europe.

The main purpose of this second book was, so far as lay within the powers of a mere academic writer, to warn public opinion that it could not continue to neglect foreign affairs with impunity; but it was also quite genuinely intended—subject to certain criticisms and reservations—as a reasoned defence of the foreign policy upon which the National Government won the general election of 1935.

Scarcely, however, was the ink dry upon my manuscript, when fresh events occurred, which falsified my whole thesis. The dismissal of Mr. Eden was not only regrettable in itself; the inanity of carrying it into effect on the very day when a new pronouncement of policy was expected from Herr Hitler, was a revelation of ignorance on the part of other British statesmen and a direct encouragement to fresh aggression. Historians may one day come to regard this incident as having decided the fate of Austria, and so of Czechoslovakia and of the European balance. In any case

the German conquest of Austria followed within a month and raised so much dust in the world as temporarily to blind author, publisher, and public alike to the fact that what happened on 17 February was a complete reversal of British policy, and that through no fault of mine, and without the alteration of a single word, my book had been converted from an apology to a criticism. During the summer, thanks to secretiveness of utterance on the part of those in office, it was still possible to hope that such fears were exaggerated, that the firm impression conveyed by the Government's attitude during the crisis of 21 May was genuine, not accidental, and that in the Spanish question it was really capable of drawing a distinction between 'intervention' and 'non-intervention'. But its attitude throughout the September crisis dispelled many comfortable illusions. The settlement of Munich—acclaimed at the time by its admirers as the personal policy of the Prime Minister—was seen to be something equally at variance with League principles, with the traditional Balance of Power in Europe, and with defence of democracy and international law. Under these circumstances I decided not to attempt a revised edition of *Britain and the Dictators*, but to leave it, for good or for ill, in its original form of March 1938 and to write an entirely separate book, dealing with the crisis that culminated, or at least seemed to culminate, in the settlement of Munich.

I have not written from the angle of any party. Brought up as a Conservative, I was a Liberal for thirty years, and then from 1931 till September 1938 a supporter of the National Government. To-day more than ever before, I believe that a united National Government, embracing all shades of political opinion, is needed in the great emergency which confronts us.

But if unity is to be achieved, there must be a return to those fundamental principles of policy on which the present Government won the election of 1935 and from which it has since departed. 'Peace through the League', 'support of the League', 'absolute loyalty to the Covenant', 'risks for peace', and 'remedy of the deficiencies in our defence services since the War'—all these are phrases from speeches of the then Prime Minister, Mr. Baldwin, and similar quotations could be made from Sir Samuel Hoare and Mr. Chamberlain. To-day they can only be read with a shudder by any one who realizes the condition of our defences last September and the extent of our betrayal of the cause of liberty and collective security in Europe.

And most of all it is necessary to protest against the totalitarian tendencies inside our own Government, which lead the Prime Minister himself to accuse any one who dares to criticize his policy of 'fouling his own nest' and to unite with the Führer in denouncing as 'war-mongers' and 'war-at-any-price men' men who have been his close colleagues in the past and might in the future be called upon to replace him. The motive of Herr Hitler is quite obvious to the meanest intelligence, though it is necessary to go back a long way in British history, in order to find similar interference on the part of a foreign ruler. But it is deplorable that British statesmen should even by their silence lend themselves to such a manœuvre: it is easy to imagine what Palmerston or Canning, Disraeli or Gladstone or Salisbury, would have said under similar circumstances. In reality 'war-monger' and 'defeatist' are rival terms of abuse which ought to be ruled out of the vocabulary of honourable controversy.

The book is dedicated to Dr. Beneš, a great democrat, a great patriot, and a great internationalist, the

testing of whose character in the crucible of war and diplomacy I was privileged to watch at close quarters from 1915 to 1919, and whose whole record since that time, as Foreign Minister, as one of the moving spirits at Geneva, and finally as President, will one day stand out as one of the most consistent and constructive contributions to European statesmanship. In view of the fact that Dr. Beneš has been living in London for the last three months, it will probably forestall speculation and misunderstanding if I state quite categorically, that he has not seen my manuscript and bears not an atom of responsibility for its contents.

R. W. SETON-WATSON

*2 February, 1939*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE AUSTRIAN CRISIS

HOWEVER divergent may be the views held regarding the main course of events in Europe during 1938, there is general agreement that they have resulted in a drastic disturbance of the political balance on the Continent, the full consequences of which it is still too soon to estimate. The conquest of Austria and the partition of Czechoslovakia followed logically from the military revival of Germany, coinciding with the passive and even somnolent policy of the Western democracies, and with their failure to agree over such crucial issues as Abyssinia and the Mediterranean. This tempted the Fuhrer and the Duce to conclude that the very real conflicts of interest between them in Central Europe were far outweighed by the advantages of common action along the so-called Rome-Berlin Axis. Austria, for whose independent status Signor Mussolini had been ready to risk war in the summer of 1934, was sacrificed to Germany in return for something more valuable than an oral guarantee of the Brenner frontier—namely, active support of Italian designs in the Mediterranean and of the war waged by Italy upon Republican Spain (for this is what, in effect, the civil war in Spain has long since become). Victory in Spain, it is calculated, will assure to the Axis Powers many valuable strategic advantages and perhaps enable them to force the Western democracies on to the defensive, while giving the United States much cause for preoccupation in the semi-Fascist Latin world of Central and South America. For the Duce, the goal of empire along the whole North African coast and

absolute control of the Mediterranean sea-routes is clearly indicated. For the Führer there remains a more difficult choice: he may seek to build up a new German autocratic World-Power on the ruins of the British Commonwealth—a course which would bring him sooner or later into certain conflict with the U.S.—or he may concentrate his main efforts upon a great colonial adventure in the East of Europe, combining racial and economic expansion with the establishment of a ring of subservient vassals. To-day, as in the past, there are two political schools of thought in Germany, which may conveniently be called Westerners and Easterners. While some put Eastern domination as the final goal and refuse to be diverted by overseas ambitions, which would merely raise fresh enemies against them, others hold that the overthrow of France as a military power is the key to every door, that before its achievement Germany would always be threatened from the rear, while afterwards everything, both east and west, could almost be had for the asking.

One thing seems fairly certain, and is believed to weigh with many of Germany's best soldiers. Hitherto Hitler has achieved 'bloodless victories', while his craven opponents have paid Danegeld out of other people's property. To-day even the most obtuse of them realize that concessions, so far from bringing them immunity, have only whetted the tiger's appetite, and that next time they will have to pay with their own property. This means that the two Dictators have far less hope of successful blackmail than on former occasions, and the certainty that victory, even if it comes, will be very costly. Unhappily (and this is what fills the initiated with growing alarm), the knowledge of this may not serve as a deterrent, for two reasons. On the one hand a vast machine, which is deliberately

constructed for the preparation of war, cannot be put into reverse gear without very dangerous consequences; and, worse still, the controls are in the hands of men whose mood is compounded of megalomania, a mystical belief in destiny, a dizziness engendered by the growing pace and perhaps a feeling that only one way of escape is possible for a régime which has mortgaged all its resources up to the hilt and is dependent upon a fresh *coup* every few months for the maintenance of its prestige. Dr. Goebbels has told us, in one of his calculated indiscretions, that the dictatorships enjoy a great advantage over the democracies in that they have a whole series of objectives in view, and being untrammelled by popular control (and, he might have added, financial sanity or restraint) can prepare them all simultaneously and then launch at a moment's notice, and with lightning speed, the enterprise upon which they ultimately decide to concentrate. There is a good deal in this argument, and there are many indications that we shall soon be confronted yet again by some rapid *coup* such as those of March 1936, March 1938, and September 1938. This is, after all, only another way of saying that the burglar cares little whether he effects an entry by the pantry or the drawing-room window; it is an admission that he is on the prowl, and that plunder is his aim. But such reasoning may prove to be over-simplified; for the choice between eastward and westward aggression is an issue so complex as to defy calculation.

### *Austria in 1918*

It is not the purpose of this volume to tell the tragic story of Austria in the last twenty years.<sup>1</sup> It begins

<sup>1</sup> The opening sections of this book, as far as p. 34, are partly based on three earlier articles—'Austria and her Neighbours' (*Slavonic Review*, April

with the sudden plunge from the position of a great empire of 28 millions, which was but the larger half of the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary numbering 52 millions, ranking fifth among the Great Powers of Europe, to that of a small post-War Republic of 6½ millions, with its overgrown capital city of Vienna reduced to dire political and economic straits. The dynasty had fallen, the aristocracy had lost the last vestige of influence, the Church had for the time lost its privileged position, the joint Army had fallen into its component parts. The new 'Succession States' had cut themselves adrift and created new currencies and political systems of their own; Austria was only saved from utter disaster by the intervention of the League of Nations. The new democratic Republic, in which at first the Social Democratic Party, under such able leaders as Victor Adler, Renner, Seitz, and Otto Bauer played the decisive role, sympathized with the German Revolution and its product, the Weimar Constitution. The Socialists were mainly responsible for inserting in the new Austrian constitution of November 1918 a clause to the effect that 'Austria is a constituent part of the German republic'; but for that very reason union was looked upon with misgivings by the Clericals, who then controlled the provinces, in contrast to Socialist Vienna.

The scale was turned against the Anschluss by the Allies, who made economic help to Austria conditional upon the maintenance of an independent Austrian state. In 1919-20 dire economic need dominated everything. The situation could only be saved by a so-called 'Black and Red Bloc' of Socialists and Clericals—

1935), 'Europe and the Austrian Question' (*International Affairs*, May 1936), and 'The German Minority in Czechoslovakia' (*Foreign Affairs*, New York, July 1938)

obviously a mere temporary expedient which could not last—and by foreign financial assistance; and hence, by common consent, the Anschluss had to be shelved for the time being. The Clerical Governments which followed made their bargain with the Pan-Germans; and a renewed shelving of the Anschluss was the price paid for placing the Socialists in a minority. But in any case, as Germany moved away from the Left and became involved in economic and currency troubles, and above all when the German mark plunged, there was a general feeling in Austria of thankfulness that independence had been preserved. From 1922 onwards, then, there is a steady trend towards the Right, though Vienna itself remains under Socialist administration, and its municipality (at the expense of the owners of house property) performs wonders in the sphere of model dwellings and working-class hygiene. A more ominous aspect of this period was the rivalry between town and country, in which the eight other provinces, combining on a clerical and agrarian basis, gradually isolated, hemmed in and drove on to the defensive, Socialist Vienna.

### *Political Lines of Cleavage*

In the years that followed, Austria was not wanting in really talented leaders—Monsignor Seipel for the Christian Socialists or Clericals, Dr. Carl Renner for the Right-Wing Socialists, and midway between them Dr. Schober, the ex-Police Chief, who once saved the situation by forming a Cabinet of officials, but ended his career under a cloud, owing to his ill-starred attempt to spring an Austro-German customs union upon Europe in 1931. The decade in which these three men were most active was one of slow convalescence, and may be claimed to have demonstrated quite

clearly that Austria was *lebensfähig* or *viable*, capable of an independent existence in the twentieth no less than from the ninth to the sixteenth century. By 1934 or so the real question had ceased to be whether Austria could stand alone (like a round dozen of more backward and less favoured States in Europe), but whether the alternative of German unity, despite certain very obvious dangers and objections, could be rendered more seductive to the rising generation than it had been to their elders.

In those years the lines of political division did not differ very materially from those of the pre-War Austria; the essential difference was that partition had removed the non-German nationalities, whose presence had complicated every party issue by splitting it into its national, social, and economic elements. After the War the two great rivals, with something like 40 per cent each, were the Christian Socialists on the Right and the Social Democrats on the Left, the remaining 20 per cent consisting of the old Pan-Germans or ultra-Nationalists, who in the end merged quite naturally in the main stream of Nazism. If the first two could have combined, the third would never have had a chance of success: it was to their shortsighted inability to combine that Austria's final downfall was due. What made the feud almost incurable was the formation of what were in effect rival party armies—the Schutzbund by the Socialists, the Heimwehr by the Clericals. The *émeute* of 1927, in which the Palace of Justice was burnt down, and which was due almost equally to official ineptitude and foreign intrigue, was the first signboard on the road to civil war, and those in power lacked not only the courage, but probably the power, to disarm the two sides, both of which possessed hidden illicit stores of arms.

*The Dollfuss Régime*

From 1929 to 1933 there was a gradual shifting in the internal balance of forces, the Socialists being more and more on the defensive, and Communism failing to make much impression on the masses. By the latter year the democratic constitution of 1918 was breaking down under pressure of external events in Italy and Germany. The leaders of the Right, Engelbert Dollfuss with his personal backing, Dr. Steidle and that superficial, unstable aristocrat Prince Starhemberg, sought in Fascist Italy their model for a State reconstituted on 'Christian Corporative' lines. It was an irony of fate that Dollfuss, a true Austrian patriot according to his own narrow lights, used all his undoubted popularity with the peasant masses to widen the gulf between Centre and Left, and looked askance on any *rapprochement* with the democratic Czechs. He lacked the statesmanship to realize that this was the psychological moment for restoring the old Black and Red Bloc, when Hitler's advent to power in Germany and his ferocious suppression of Socialism and democracy led the Austrian Socialists to renounce the idea of an Anschluss which would involve them in a similar fate—when, moreover, the Clericals were being strengthened in their old dislike of Prussia by her new centralizing policy towards the South German States and by the Nazi attitude towards both the Catholic and Protestant Churches. Now, if ever, there was the possibility of creating a united front against the campaign of terrorism which Hitler was not slow to launch against his native Austria.

Unhappily Dollfuss decided upon the exact opposite, and in February 1934 it came to the armed suppression of Austrian Socialism; the allegations of

rebellion, put forward at the time in order to mislead foreign opinion, have long since been refuted. The party was dissolved, its leaders arrested or driven into exile, the working-class dwellings which had been a model to Europe ruthlessly bombarded, the Press muzzled, the trade unions and many cultural societies broken up and their funds confiscated. It has long since ceased to be a secret that the main incentive for this fatal *coup* came from Italy, and that Mussolini's special anger had been directed against Austrian Socialism by the action of workmen in the Steyr-Hirtenberg factories in revealing the secret transfers of arms from Italy to Hungary.

This was no mere crime, it was the crassest of political blunders; for it weakened Austria's powers of resistance to the Nazi offensive from Bavaria and strengthened Nazidom inside Austria, while at the same time before Europe it destroyed the case for a liberty-loving Austria defending itself against Germany, the suppressor of political liberty. During the six months that followed, the masses were sullen and disillusioned, at times tempted in their despair to plunge into Communism or Nazism. The Government services were infiltrated with treason and disaffection. Even the police was in touch with Munich and Berlin, and could hardly be blamed for this precaution when it knew that the leaders of resistance to Nazism, the Feys and Starhembergs, and even Dollfuss himself on occasion, were secretly conferring with Hitler's representatives. An important section of the intellectuals, the students and universities, favoured the idea of merging in the Greater German Fatherland, saying to themselves that unity alone could solve their troubles, that Hitler and Goebbels will pass, but that Germany is eternal. Meanwhile the Cabinet talked of the



corporative principle and of 'Austro-Fascism', but it had no clear programme and was neither homogeneous nor unanimous.

What saved Austria in the critical six months following the 'Putsch from Above' was not any merit on the part of the Dollfuss Government, but the arrogance and bad tactics of the desperadoes to whose hands the Nazi offensive against Austria had been entrusted. The intensive campaign conducted by Habicht, Frauenfeld, and the 'Austrian Legion', by wireless, by lavish use of funds, and by acts of naked terrorism, was duly reported in the Press, but public opinion on the West was all too slow in realizing the character and methods of Germany's new rulers. Then came the Thirtieth of June, when by midnight murder and illegal execution the Fuhrer rid himself of scores of men who had long been his most trusted and intimate comrades in arms. The details of the *coup*, as they trickled through, petrified Austria, and indeed Europe, with horror. But its success merely served as an encouragement to fresh efforts: and so, less than a month later, there followed the almost incredible affair of Twenty-fifth July—the raid upon the central broadcasting station in Vienna, the seizure of the Ballplatz, the deliberate and brutal murder of Dr. Dollfuss, and the abortive rising in Carinthia and Styria. That the whole plot was directly planned and inspired from Munich and Berlin was sufficiently notorious at the time; this was proved up to the hilt by the evidence published in the *Austrian Brown Book* of 1935, and one of the first consequences of the Anschluss in March 1938 was that the Nazi leaders threw off the last shadow of pretence by proclaiming Planetta, Holzweber, and the whole gang of cowardly murderers as martyrs in the sacred cause of Germanism.

What really saved Austria was not so much her own measures of defence, as the crass bungling of the gunmen and the hesitation of Hitler in face of an angry Europe and of a Reichswehr not yet ready for war. The German Minister in Vienna was recalled, the traitor Rintelen repudiated, the Austrian Legion withdrawn from the Bavarian frontier, Nazi terror called off. Herr von Papen, with his American reputation for secret sabotage, and with his pose as a devout Catholic, was sent to Vienna to apply slower and subtler methods of disintegration. One last factor turned the scale in favour of peace—the massing of Italian troops on the Brenner, and this was to be regarded as the one helpful contribution of Signor Mussolini towards a situation which he had done more than any man to embroil. At the moment such action was still a deterrent; at the supreme Austrian crisis three years later the military scales were already heavily weighted against Italy, and the Duce found it expedient to extract political advantages from a timely endorsement of what he lacked the power to prevent.

That acute and courageous observer, Mr. Gedye, has aptly summed up the situation created by the Nazi murder plot of July 1934: 'The real tragedy is that Dollfuss, with his unusual personal courage, energy, and determination, his political agility and personal charm, should have destroyed Austrian liberty in the name of Austrian independence.'<sup>1</sup>

### *Austria Under Schuschnigg*

Under Herr von Schuschnigg, who succeeded Dollfuss as Chancellor, Austria led a precarious existence. The terror was called off, calm and confidence slowly

<sup>1</sup> *Fallen Bastions*, p. 65—an unusually outspoken and detailed study of the Austrian and Czechoslovak crises.

returned; but liberty was gone, the régime was only less authoritarian than that of Germany in the sense that Austrian methods are always less drastic than Prussian and leave more loopholes for evasion. There was a strong revulsion of feeling against the Nazis, and Catholic opinion, led by the Austrian episcopate, was outraged by the persecution of Catholicism in Germany and by the inclusion of many prominent Catholics among the victims of Thirtieth June. 'Austria', declared Cardinal Innitzer of Vienna, in November 1934, 'is the hope of the Catholics in the Reich, who are reverting to the conditions of the Catacombs.'

Unfortunately Schuschnigg, who was the soul of honour according to his narrow lights, and who showed high physical and moral courage, from the very start lacked the personal magnetism of Dollfuss, and also his contacts with the masses; and he was surrounded by mediocrities such as Fey and Starhemberg, whose only idea consisted in repression of 'the Reds'. It was not enough to proclaim, as he did in his first broadcast after the murder, that 'peace and order, decency and civilization' would be the basis of his régime—which was another way of saying that Nazi Germany had abandoned those standards. It was quite impossible to arouse any real enthusiasm for the new Corporative Constitution, with its artificial division of power between a Federal Parliament, a Diet, Cultural and Economic Councils and a State Council, and with its drastic restrictions upon the elective principle and its steady extension of the censorship. Even the attempt to find a basis in the Papal Encyclical 'Quadragesimo Anno'—stressed incongruously enough by the frivolous Starhemberg—was met with scepticism on the part of the pre-War generation, while a growing number of the younger practising Catholics held the view that

there was nothing essentially incompatible between Christianity and democracy,<sup>1</sup> and that Fascism was a bastard and thoroughly un-German importation.

It is true that Schuschnigg gradually came to realize the impossibility of maintaining his régime through the agency of such men as Fey and Starhemberg, and ejected first one and then the other from office and power with a feline suddenness for which he had not till then been credited. But what he could not be brought to realize till after it was too late, was that there was one way, and one only, of saving Austrian independence, with its peculiar brand of South German Catholic culture and its individualist, carefree, easy-going methods of *Gemütlichkeit* and *Schlamperei*. This way was to convert his minority Government—resting on a milder edition of that ‘totalitarianism’ and ‘authoritarianism’ which he was challenging in its Nazi form—into a majority Government, based on a free coalition and the consent of at least 80 per cent of the population.

Meanwhile he was rapidly losing the backing of the one man whose help in 1934 had seemed Austria’s salvation, but who in reality, by urging Dollfuss on to the February *coup* against the Socialists, had done more than any other to prepare Austria’s downfall, and who was still as bent as ever on preventing a compromise between Right and Left. By the summer of 1936 Mussolini realized that the abandonment of his vassal in Vienna was the price by which he could win the support of Germany against the Western democracies in the Mediterranean. Poland had already been bought off by the Reich. The Balkan Entente was to be gradually permeated by economic and racial propaganda,

<sup>1</sup> And perhaps even between Christianity and Socialism, as is so widely taken for granted on the Continent, in contradistinction to the English-speaking countries.

and in the end included in a reactionary *bloc* stretching from the Baltic to the Aegean. Czechoslovakia, with her central strategic position, her fine army and economic resources, her able statesmen and seemingly safe alliances, was the real obstacle, and must at all costs be isolated and rendered innocuous. To achieve this, the first and most obvious step was the overthrow of Austrian independence; and Mussolini was all the more ready to fall in with this, because the alternative was to leave the Italian Army to bear the brunt of eventual onslaught by a Germany arming to the teeth and growing stronger every month.

The Austro-German Agreement of 11 July 1936 was the result of Mussolini's pressure upon Schuschnigg, and of the subtle Herr von Papen's success in convincing the devout Chancellor that he was thereby furthering the cause of Catholicism. The Western Powers were naïve enough to welcome it as a *détente*, failing to realize that its first clause, recognizing Austria's 'full sovereignty, in the sense of the Führer's statement of 21 May 1935'<sup>1</sup> was rendered nugatory by the others, and above all by the secret clauses. These, under the guise of equality, opened the door to Press and 'cultural' propaganda, pledged Schuschnigg to include Nazis in his Cabinet at a 'suitable' date, and set up virtual control of Austrian foreign policy, thereby checking the growing tendency towards economic and political *rapprochement* of the Danubian States.<sup>2</sup>

The Agreement brought no cessation, but only an accentuation, of Nazi intrigue in Austria, and during 1937 the toils closed round Schuschnigg. Still in his

<sup>1</sup> 'Germany had neither the intention nor the desire to interfere in internal Austrian affairs nor to carry out the annexation or Anschluss of Austria'

<sup>2</sup> For fuller details, see Chapter XIII ('Secret History') of Mr. Gedye's *Fallen Bastions*, written with strong anti-Nazi bias, but from close inside knowledge of the facts.

blindness, instead of seeking an alliance with those elements of the population which had everything to lose by a Nazi conquest and would if necessary fight for liberty, he must needs revive the Habsburg legitimist agitation, failing to realize that the restoration of Otto would merely precipitate a German invasion, and that the Austrian masses would not lift a finger in a cause too much identified with aristocratic and priestly reaction.

### *Rival Pronouncements in Europe*

Meanwhile, during the autumn and winter of 1937-8 there had been a perceptible widening of the breach between the two main camps in Europe, despite repeated disclaimers on the part of responsible British statesmen of any desire or need for any such cleavage. The firm action of the Western Powers at the Conference of Nyon early in September had had an immediate effect in checking the impudent submarine campaign pursued in the name of non-intervention. At the end of the month the Duce was received with signal honours in Germany, but also with unexampled police precautions; yet he did not hesitate to affirm that Germany and Italy were the two greatest and most genuine democracies in the world, contrasting favourably with countries whose boasted system of the 'Rights of Man' was compounded of 'money, capital, secret societies, and mutually hostile political groups'. In marked contrast to this bombast was the pronouncement of President Roosevelt on 8 October, in which he warned his people of the growing interdependence of the modern world and declared that 'we as a nation seek spiritual union with all who love freedom'. Mr. Chamberlain at once welcomed this 'clarion call from the other side of the Atlantic', but

ten days later in the House of Commons he laid stress on the repeated disclaimers given by the Italian Government of any design upon Spanish Morocco or the Balearic Isles, and stressed his belief in 'the good faith' which prompted them. Otherwise he refused to be drawn into controversy, and at the Guildhall banquet carried platitude to heights hitherto unattained, leaving behind him a single pointed phrase, that 'informal discussion' was preferable to 'public declamation'. This would seem to have nettled the Führer, for in his Augsburg speech of 21 November he re-stated the German demand for colonies in a somewhat different form, saying that this 'demand for living-room' would be put forward more and more loudly, whether other countries liked it or not, and until the world could not but recognize the German claim.

### *Schuschnigg's Downfall*

Throughout the winter the Führer was secretly maturing his plans for the final absorption of Austria. This time, as in the case of the Rhineland *coup*, he met with strong opposition from the Army chiefs, who remained unconvinced by his confidence in yet another bloodless victory and insisted on the many strategic and economic risks which a general European war would involve. He therefore postponed his usual annual Reichstag speech on 30 January, and on 4 February carried out a purge of the Army High Command, and at the same time set up a secret Cabinet Council to advise him in foreign affairs, and appointed the militant Nazi Herr von Ribbentrop as Foreign Minister in place of the more old-fashioned Baron Neurath. The manner in which these changes were carried out was in striking contrast to the purge of Thirtieth June; this time the chief victims, Marshal

Blomberg, General Fritsch, and other high officers were 'complimented out' with every possible honour. But the result was none the less a victory for the more radical elements in the party—Ribbentrop, Goebbels, and Himmler—and found speedy expression both in home and foreign policy. This became abundantly clear in Herr Hitler's speech of 20 February, in which he coupled German colonial claims with a fresh attack on the League as an institution, and expressed his resolve never to re-enter it, since it was not 'an instrument of justice'. Other no less violent attacks were directed against Russia, which in its Bolshevik form was 'now more than before, the incarnation of human destructive forces', and which must be met by a strengthening of the anti-Comintern alliance, and against the international Press, whose impudence in dropping 'incendiary poison' had become 'unendurable'.

In another no less significant passage he alluded to the ten million Germans in neighbouring states which till 1866 had been joined to the bulk of the German nation by a national link, but had been prevented from joining the Reich after the War, in defiance of the principle of self-determination. This pointed reference to the Germans of Austria and of Czechoslovakia was toned down by allusions to a 'final reconciliation' with Austria on lines endorsed by the Austrian Chancellor; but, he added, 'It does not lie in the power of man to stop rolling the stone of fate which through neglect or unwisdom has been set moving.' The whole tone of the speech was blunt and unconciliatory, rejecting all those schemes of international co-operation and appeasement which are associated with the idea of Geneva, and for which the Van Zeeland Report had recently sought to find a new economic formula. Its background was the categorical statement of colonial



claims—entirely divorced from any give and take on such subjects as access to raw materials or trusteeship for the natives—made in private conversation with Lord Halifax and Sir Nevile Henderson.

Still more ominously rang the phrases relating to Austria, for just a week earlier, while a growing number of troops were massed along the Bavarian frontier, Herr von Schuschnigg had been beguiled to Berchtesgaden and there browbeaten in altogether unexampled fashion by the Nazi Dictator. Trusting to Herr von Papen's assurances that the two Chancellors would speedily reach an amicable agreement, Schuschnigg took under his arm the dossier of the unmasked terrorist Dr. Tavs, in the simple belief that he had only to lay the facts before the Führer, to win his co-operation. Instead of this, he found that Herr Hitler did not attempt to conceal his approval of the plot, shouted him down, submitted him to hysterical invective and threatened immediate invasion unless his ultimatum were accepted within three days.<sup>1</sup> Schuschnigg held out on a number of points, but his resistance was borne down in two vital directions: the key post of Minister of the Interior was assigned to the crypto-Nazi Dr. von Seyss-Inquart, whom Schuschnigg imagined to be his friend, while the Foreign Office was handed over to Dr. Guido Schmidt, a vain and inexperienced cypher.

Then, and not till then, did Schuschnigg realize the full extent of Austria's danger and the need for widening the Fatherland Front. In the first days of

<sup>1</sup> The incredible but true story has gradually leaked out, and has been told in Dr. Borkenau's *Austria and After*, in Mr. Gedye's *Fallen Bastions*, and elsewhere. It may be asked whether Mr. Chamberlain knew, or disbelieved, the facts (which were certainly in the possession of the Foreign Office), when he himself followed Herr von Schuschnigg to Berchtesgaden seven months later.

March he at last consented to discuss a coalition of Clericals and Socialists and those minimum concessions to the trade unions without which the leaders could not hope to rally the rank and file. And at the same time he sprang a march upon the disconcerted Austrian Nazis by announcing an immediate plebiscite—inviting the population to vote for ‘a free and German, independent and social, Christian and united Austria’—a somewhat clumsy formula, yet one which, in so dire an emergency, was accepted on all sides and would unquestionably have resulted in an overwhelming majority. It was the knowledge that the Nazi vote would have sunk to almost negligible proportions, and that within a very few hours the Government would have been reconstituted as a popular front from Right to Left, capable of restoring Austrian political liberties and fortifying the growing belief in Austrian independence—it was this certainty which prompted the Führer to forestall the plebiscite at all costs by a series of ultimata,<sup>1</sup> and late on the evening of 11 March to order his army to cross the frontier and march upon Linz and Vienna. Nothing brings out the farcical character of Government by Plebiscite more clearly than the indignation of the Nazis when Schuschnigg tried to hoist them with their own petard (that is, to use *against* them and not for them, the whole apparatus of the State), and again the fact that the Nazi Plebiscite of 10 April resulted in a totalitarian poll of 99 per cent in a country where no one at all, a month earlier, would have dreamt of estimating the Clerical and Socialist vote at less than an absolute minimum of 20 to 25 per cent each. Had these dissidents simply vanished into thin air?

<sup>1</sup> The Nazi denial of ultimata is disposed of very thoroughly by Mr. Gedye in *Fallen Bastions*, pp 289-91.

All that has since transpired only confirms the courage and sterling honesty, but also the fatal limitations, of Herr von Schuschnigg. 'These dwarfs,' said the brutal victor of the man whom his agents had murdered and of the man whom he himself had battered into surrender; and the remark was not without truth, though it came with bad grace from one who himself claimed to be 'the greatest German' of all time. Opinions will probably always differ as to what would have happened if the Austrian Army, small but good, had resisted the advancing columns. The confusion and the breakdowns of German tanks and mechanized transport is known to have been the reason why Hitler delayed his entry into Linz, and why he was too angry to make a speech at his first arrival in Vienna. There are many who believe, rightly or wrongly, that the Austrian Army would have been quite capable of holding out for a week or so, and that this would have had surprising repercussions inside Germany itself. But in some respects the gravest criticism which can be brought against Schuschnigg is that in his dislike of bloodshed between German and German he took action which rendered bloodshed almost inevitable, encouraged thousands to show their colours at the last moment and then threw them (himself also, for he was no coward and refused to fly) to the vengeance of the invading Gestapo. Not the least tragedy of Austria's collapse was the abruptness with which the blow fell, with the result that Socialist and Catholic and Legitimist, Communist and Jew alike, were all caught like rats in a trap, that their persons, their property, and their police dossiers were equally at the mercy of the new Nazi authorities, and that none of their leaders could escape abroad.

Of the reign of terror that followed, especially among

the large Jewish community of Vienna, and the far more scattered community of those who have admixtures of 'non-Aryan' blood, it is difficult to write calmly; it indicated, what the events of the summer and winter were to accentuate still further, that while dreams of racial unity were the excuse, plunder was a more and more dire necessity for the Third Reich, with its depleted coffers and overstrained war economy. The Führer, after his talk with Lord Halifax, and on the basis of Herr von Ribbentrop's cynically accurate reports of British inertia, had justly calculated that there would be no very serious reaction in the West, and indeed that once the Duce had been squared by the guarantee of the Brenner frontier (subject, like all German pledges, to the elastic clause *rebus sic stantibus*) there was literally no Power which could hope to interfere effectively on Austria's behalf. That he had forsworn the idea of annexation in the most important of all his public speeches (21 May 1935), that he was now breaking his pledge of 11 July 1936, and even the terms which he had dictated to Schuschnigg at Berchtesgaden as recently as 12 February 1938, did not trouble him. Providence, or the German God, had sent him to unite his people, and nothing succeeds like success.

It would, however, be the height of folly to minimize the bigness of Hitler's achievement. It is true that the Great War was needed to destroy the balance of forces between Austria and Prussia, between Habsburg and Hohenzollern; but now this 'Bohemian Corporal', as Junker Hindenburg so contemptuously called him, has shown his superb mastery of political strategy and technique and completed a process which neither Metternich nor Bismarck had come near achieving, and which we may consider as irrevocable, except

perhaps as regards some return to a federal system within the 'Great German Reich'. In January 1937 he had assured Europe that 'the period of surprises is now over', and now he stunned the world with another lightning stroke, incidentally showing how much value should be attached to his promises.

Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons on 14 March admitted that the rape of Austria had 'created a new situation' and 'administered a profound shock to all who are interested in the preservation of European peace. . . . The immediate result must be to intensify the sense of uncertainty and insecurity in Europe. . . .' Let us try to give more concrete definition to this perfectly accurate generalization.

1. Germany acquired a further population of 6½ millions and became a solid block astride the centre of the Continent—'the Seventy-million Reich' of Great German tradition.

2. National Socialism swallowed up the last wholly independent centre of a South German and Catholic culture and destroyed the possibility of free development on non-totalitarian lines. Its prospects of influence upon the many German racial fragments scattered about Central and South-eastern Europe are thereby greatly enhanced.

3. All hope of a Danubian confederation or economic union, in whatever form, was finally destroyed, and the Danubian and Balkan markets were opened wide to German trade expansion.

4. Austria itself provided the Reich with valuable resources in iron ore and timber, a respectable gold reserve, a welcome supply of foreign currency and 'devisen', and great prospects of plunder among the once rich Jewish community of Vienna.

5. Above all, Germany's strategic position was

immensely strengthened. On the south she is now protected by the great mountain barrier of the Alps, and on the south-east controls the gates into the great Hungarian plain. Perched upon the Brenner, she looks down the path followed for centuries by German invaders. She is scarcely likely to submit indefinitely to the ruthless Italianization of South Tirol. Her right to an economic outlet on the Adriatic at Trieste can hardly be denied, so long as it is not made the excuse for political hegemony. But this hegemony, from the new German frontier to the Adriatic, Aegean, and Euxine, is exactly what is feared by all the lesser countries which occupy that area, and if once made effective, might soon enable her to snap her fingers at a naval blockade, in view of the vast resources in minerals, oil, wheat, and timber which would then be at her disposal.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CZECH CRISIS

#### *German and Czech*

WITH the annexation of Austria by Germany it at once became obvious that the main weight of the Nazi *Drang nach Osten* would be directed against Czechoslovakia. It is only necessary to look at a physical map of Europe to see that the Bohemian lozenge, girt on three sides by high watersheds, stands out from the very centre of the Continent, and that Bismarck was not far wrong when he called it 'a fortress created by God Himself'. The frontier of the Bohemian lands was one of the best natural frontiers in Europe, equal to the Pyrenees and the Tatra; and that is why it survived for over a thousand years. But in 1938 the Czechs found themselves in much the same position as in the first quarter of the fifteenth century when, as champions of the Hussite faith, they had to defend their frontiers upon four sides from the invading armies of the Reich and of Sigismund of Hungary, who stood for dynastic and religious orthodoxy. Then too there was a strong German minority within the State which (as in the dispute at the University of Prague) sided with the Council of Constance against the followers of Hus and Wycliffe. In those days Bohemia held crusading Europe at bay, but at a heavy price of fanaticism and impoverishment: the strain was too great, and laid the seeds of national downfall amid the horrors of the Thirty Years War. She was now soon to be faced with a no less momentous decision; united as she had never been in the past, but also confronted by forces far more formidable, she might be staking

once more her very existence as a nation. But quite apart from her strategic position Czechoslovakia had a very special importance as the last surviving democratic State in Europe east of the Rhine, and as a State whose whole policy had for nineteen years been consistently and actively based upon the principles of the League of Nations. In both capacities she was a rock of offence to Nazi Germany, and her overthrow would be at once a strategic and a moral triumph.

Moreover, Germany had a first-class pretext for interference: the frontiers of Czechoslovakia included a minority of  $3\frac{1}{4}$  million Germans, and after the Anschluss this was the largest of all the German minorities outside the borders of the Reich—larger even than the German population of Switzerland (which of course does not fall under the category of ‘minority’, but is of first-class cultural importance to the whole German race). It is at the outset necessary to distinguish between a perfectly natural and legitimate interest of the Reich in the fate of its kinsmen beyond the frontier, and the attempt to use these kinsmen as a kind of Trojan horse, for the introduction of totalitarian ideas into a democratic Republic. These two very different currents can hardly be understood without a certain retrospect upon German-Czech relations in the recent past.

The two races have lived side by side since the thirteenth century. The long Hussite Wars greatly reduced the German element, but the Reformation of the sixteenth century brought a certain *détente*, and there was a fresh influx of Germans. In the period of the Counter-Reformation Hussite and Lutheran, Czech and German, stood together against the Habsburgs and shared the same fate when Bohemian independence was overthrown in 1620. The Czech



nobility and intellectual class was nearly rooted out, and the German urban population was decimated. For the next two centuries, during the period of Czech national eclipse, the centralist and autocratic tendencies of the Habsburgs were largely identified with Germanization: and by the time that the Czech renaissance began early last century, not merely the upper, but almost the whole educated middle class in Bohemia had acquired a German veneer. None the less, in the absolutist period preceding 1848 there was little friction between the two races, and more than one German Bohemian writer chose his theme from the heroic age of the Hussites.

In 1848 the two fell rapidly apart again, and the Czechs, declining the invitation to the German Federal Parliament in Frankfurt, convoked a Pan-Slav Congress in Prague itself, though their leader Palacky coined the catchword, so often misused since, 'If there were no Austria, it would be necessary to create one.' From 1848 to 1918 the political and linguistic struggle waged between German and Czech was the central feature of that 'question of nationalities' for which the Habsburg Monarchy got its unenviable reputation. It was waged in every town and village, in every sphere of administrative and social life, in school and law court, on every shop sign or public notice. The Czechs opposed the establishment of the Dual System in 1867 and at first boycotted the Austrian Parliament, but after 1879 they adopted parliamentary tactics and with every decade forced the Germans a little more on to the defensive, and allied themselves with the Jugoslavs and some of the other non-German races. One feature, however, distinguished the Czechs from most of those others: they were all inside the boundaries of the Habsburg Monarchy, and had no kindred national

State towards which they could gravitate. Till the vast hazard of war made independence possible, their chief aim was to recover the 'State Rights' of the Bohemian Crown and acquire an equal status with Hungary and the hereditary Austrian provinces.

The Great War naturally increased the tension between the Czechs and Germans. To the former the conflict with their Russian and Serbian kinsmen differed but little from civil war. They surrendered in thousands to the 'enemy' and soon proved that their motive was the reverse of cowardice by enlisting in the Czech Legions on the Allied side. Their Odyssey in Siberia is one of the most romantic incidents of the whole War, and proved to be the trump card in the long propaganda efforts of the Czech National Council, which was formed in Paris by that remarkable triumvirate, Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefaník.

### *Czechoslovak Independence*

This is not the place to tell the story of their long struggle for Czechoslovak unity and independence, whose success was due above all to Masaryk's true perception of the forces which ultimately decided the struggle. Russophil though he was, he rejected the fatuous idea of waiting passively for the Russian steam-roller to crush Austria-Hungary, and for reactionary Tsarism to liberate the democratic Czechs. He saw that Czechoslovak freedom could only come through a victory of the Western democracies and America, and set himself, and in the long run successfully, to convince their leaders that Austria-Hungary could not be detached from Germany and was doomed to disintegrate. He himself reached Washington in the spring of 1918, at the critical moment when the lines of the final settlement were at last being considered by the Allied

and Associated Powers, and his influence helped to shape the Notes which President Wilson addressed to Vienna in the following October and which acted as a trumpet-blast against the walls of the Austrian Jericho. Not the least remarkable result was the bloodless creation of the Czechoslovak Republic on 28 October 1918. Indeed it is essential to an understanding of the Central European situation to realize that Austria-Hungary in the end was not broken up from outside, but broke down from within, as the result of the spontaneous rising of the peoples, long before the Peace Conference could meet in Paris, and indeed some days before an Armistice could be concluded.

The settlement of 1918 marked the high-water mark of the Czech-German quarrel; for what was to the first race the recovery of lost liberties after three centuries, was to the other the loss of a privileged position in favour of a despised 'under-dog'. It is useless to deny that the new State was created against the will of its German citizens, and indeed it rested upon two conflicting principles—in Bohemia upon the historic 'State Rights' of the Crown of St. Wenceslas, in Slovakia upon nationality and self-determination. In the name of the first the Germans were included in Bohemia, in the name of the second the Slovaks were excluded from Hungary. It could of course be argued that Bohemia had one of the best natural frontiers in Europe and one of the oldest, corresponding with the watersheds of the Erzgebirge, Riesengebirge, Adlergebirge, and Böhmerwald. Here and there predominantly German districts could have been detached, but this would have left unsolved two main difficulties, namely, that the major part of the lands inside the traditional Bohemian boundaries was bound up by close geographical and economic ties with central Bohemia, and that no

human ingenuity had hitherto availed to trace an ethnographic line between German and Czech. During the half-century before the War there had been repeated attempts to partition Bohemia within the Austrian Empire, but each time this *Zweiteilung* proved unworkable. The German districts fell into eight distinct fragments which it would have been difficult to administer as a single unit, and indeed in the first period following the War it soon became obvious that for geographical reasons they could not hope to remain united with the new Austrian Republic, once Czechoslovakia had asserted its independence. The sole alternative would have been to incorporate individual districts with the various federal units of which Germany was then still composed—for instance, North-eastern Moravia would have gone to Silesia, the northern districts to Saxony, the Egerland to Bavaria, and the southern districts to Austria. It is significant that there was no contemporary demand for union with Germany, but rather to maintain the Austrian connexion and with it, of course, the predominance of German over Slav. Certain lesser rectifications of frontier could have been effected without much difficulty, and the numbers of the German minority in the new State thereby reduced; but it was notorious from the very first that no ethnographic line of division could be devised, and that any transference of territory to Germany was bound to leave large minorities on *both* sides of the new frontier, however drawn. Under the circumstances the least bad of several admittedly imperfect solutions was adopted, and the frontier which had served for 700 years was allowed to remain for twenty years longer.

*The Germans of Bohemia*

A majority of German Bohemians was openly opposed to this decision; at the first General Elections in Czechoslovakia they declared that the constitution was not binding upon them; and they refused to vote for President Masaryk's election. The Czechs on their side showed much bitter anti-German feeling, and the German attitude betrayed them into exaggerated centralization. But it remains true that they respected German minority and linguistic rights and freely passed legislation such as assured fuller minority rights to the Germans than those enjoyed by any other minority in Europe, and that, taking them all in all, these rights were duly respected. The Germans had exact proportional representation in Parliamentary and municipal life; they had their own university and two technical high schools, 90 secondary and 3,363 primary schools (exclusive of training colleges and numerous specialized schools and kindergartens); they also had a complete network of cultural institutions, a free Press, and the use of their own language in all dealings with the authorities.

*The Activists and Konrad Henlein*

After a first period of effervescence there was a steady growth of political 'Activism' or co-operation, and after 1926—when there was a welcome turn towards decentralization, the State being divided into the four main units of Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and 'Carpathian Ruthenia'—the German Agrarians and Christian Socialists sent representatives into the Cabinet, the latter party being replaced in 1929 by the German Socialists, as the result of a general political move towards the Left. Year by year the tension between

the two races tended to die down, though it must be admitted that grievances remained, and that the more chauvinistic Czech elements, especially in certain ministries, delayed the pace of reform and often imparted a grudging character to quite genuine concessions. German-Bohemia was also over-industrialized and suffered with especial severity from the policy of autarchy adopted by the Reich. The rampant unemployment which resulted, and which was not only far more acute than in the (more agricultural) Czech districts, but stood out in contrast to the signal achievement of the Nazi régime in banishing unemployment from the Reich, served as a natural stimulus to political discontent. Bohemia had been the original home of the National Socialist idea in the closing years of last century, when Georg von Schönerer and Karl Hermann Wolf preached 'away from Rome', Hohenzollern against Habsburg, and rabid anti-Semitism. The old tendencies were revived under the still more radical leadership of men like Krebs and Jung, on totalitarian and racial lines. But in June 1933 the kindred National Socialist party in Austria was suppressed owing to its crassly illegal and terrorist methods, and so in October the Nazis of Czechoslovakia forestalled dissolution by voluntary disbandment. For the time being the less compromised and seemingly more moderate 'League of Comrades' (*Kameradschaftsbund*) and 'Home Front' were to serve as substitutes under the leadership of Konrad Henlein, a young and little-known gymnastic instructor at Asch in the Egerland. At the general election of May 1935 Henlein's party, now known as the Sudetendeutsche Partei (SdP for short) suddenly sprang into fame by winning 62 per cent of the total German vote, with 44 out of the 75 German seats in the Chamber. Though composed of

many heterogeneous elements, the new party was careful to profess full loyalty to the State, and the possibility of securing full German rights on the basis of the existing Constitution. Henlein assumed the decay of liberalism, and of course denounced Marxism, but continued to pay lip-service to democracy and held that neither Fascism nor Nazism was 'transferable to our special circumstances'; he also professed hostility to Habsburg restoration and to frontier revision. But he laid great stress on the idea of 'leadership', and showed his distrust of parliamentarism by not presenting himself for election, and remaining outside. His totalitarian leanings naturally involved special hostility towards the Social Democrats; with the German Agrarians he was more ready to talk, and there was always a section of the Czech Agrarians which thought it possible to reach terms not merely with Henlein, but with Hitler, and which therefore deprecated Beneš's policy of reliance on the West and on Russia. To this the real obstacle was the existence of the three German 'activist' parties, to whom the Czechs had assumed obligations since 1926, and whom they could not simply throw to the wolves.

The initial calculation that, if only given enough rope, the Henlein party would hang itself by the weight of its discordant interests, proved fatally wrong. As Hitler strengthened his position inside the Reich, withdrew from the Geneva system and pushed rearmament to fantastic lengths, the gulf widened between Germany and a country whose whole policy had from the very first rested on the League Covenant, the Kellogg Pact, the Little Entente, and in general, the idea of collective security and national disarmament. Czechoslovakia had to rearm, like her neighbours; in this respect she had the advantage of possessing one of the great

armament concerns of Europe, the Škoda works, which could supply not only her own wants but some of her neighbours' as well. She now joined France in concluding a pact of non-aggression with Russia and for a time hoped that Germany would consent to expanding this into a general 'Eastern Pact'. But when Berlin violently rejected the very idea, and set up a rival 'anti-Comintern' alliance, Prague declined to be intimidated and upheld the Russian alliance as an essentially defensive factor, entirely compatible with League principles. Meanwhile the SdP imitated Berlin's growing intransigence. In home politics it became increasingly totalitarian, denying to all other parties, Clerical and Agrarian no less than Socialist and Communist, any right to speak for the Sudeten Germans, while in foreign policy it was equally opposed to the League, to the Little Entente, and to the pacts with France and Russia. It thus became steadily more apparent that what stood in the way of any agreement between the Government and the German minority, was the conflict of political principle between the totalitarian and democratic régimes, and the differences in foreign orientation—towards the democracies or towards the axis. The two were indeed irreconcilable; the adoption of the one involved the renunciation of the other.

During 1936 Czech opinion came to realize the absolute necessity for concessions to the Germans, and the new President, Dr. Beneš (who succeeded Masaryk in December 1935), his successor as Foreign Minister, Dr. Krofta, who had been Minister in Berlin, and the Premier, Dr. Hodža, who as a Slovak and an Agrarian was less involved in the German dispute than many of his Czech colleagues, and who had played a prominent part in bringing the first Activists into the Government—



all stood committed to a policy of conciliation. It must, however, be confessed that the pace was too slow, that the programme of 'economic and administrative regionalism' announced by the President struck an uninspiring note, and that the Agreement of 18 February 1937—intended to make good the shortcomings of the Minority Law of 1920—was robbed of much of its value by the obstruction of local officials.

It was an easy game for Henlein to reject this agreement as quite inadequate and to put forward an alternative of far-reaching racial autonomy in the form of six Bills tabled in Parliament. This plan, based on corporations with a 'racial personality' of their own, was designed to bring in totalitarianism and leadership by the back door, and incidentally to lay down hard and fast rules against denationalization such as went far beyond the bounds of the possible. The plan was rejected by all sections of Czech opinion, but once more the pace of alternative reform was too slow and by the close of 1937 tension within and without was slowly but surely growing. The hopes of the Activists that, given time and economic recovery, they might recover much of the ground lost to Henlein, were seen to depend above all upon the development of the foreign situation.

### *Consequences of the Anschluss*

The opening weeks of 1938 had been marked by growing tension; the Reichstag speech of Herr Hitler on 20 February and the lamentable coincidence of Mr. Eden's resignation on the same day, were the first indications of the coming storm. Notably the Fuhrer's reference to 'the ten million Germans' in neighbouring States, which had once been linked with the rest of the nation, was a clear hint that he

intended to class Austria and the Sudeten lands together, and in a separate category from the scattered German minorities in Italy, Poland, Hungary, and the Balkans. On 4 March Dr. Hodža, in the Czechoslovak Parliament, made a moderate and dignified reply, insisting on the Republic's frontiers as 'absolutely inviolable', rebutting the idea of interference in its internal affairs, but expressing readiness to negotiate and co-operate with the Germans on equal terms. Meanwhile they would 'defend, defend, defend'. A day later President Beneš,<sup>1</sup> while insisting on the purely internal character of the minority question, declared good relations with Germany to be of vital importance and frankly recognized 'the moral right of Europe to take an interest in our minorities'.

The Anschluss followed only ten days later, and had a more immediate and catastrophic effect upon German-Czech relations inside the Republic than upon the relations of Prague and Berlin. Indeed on the critical day Marshal Goring, then acting for the Fuhrer, stated quite explicitly to Dr. Mastný, the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin, that Germany entertained no aggressive designs against Czechoslovakia; and next day he further informed him that the German occupying troops had received strict orders to keep at least 15 kilometres from the Bohemian frontier. Baron Neurath also told him that Germany considered herself bound by the German-Czech arbitration convention of October 1925. These assurances were quoted by Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons on 14 March, and still more pointedly in the House of Lords by Lord Halifax, who declared that 'we naturally expect the German Government to abide by them'. 'If indeed', he

<sup>1</sup> Interview to the *Daily Telegraph*, 6 March 1938

added, 'they desire to see European peace maintained, there is no quarter of Europe in which it is more vital that undertakings should be scrupulously respected.'

These initial references were followed on 24 March by a more authoritative definition of policy by the British Prime Minister. Faced by what he quite frankly admitted to be 'a new situation' and by the knowledge that British opinion was outraged by events in Austria and restive at the failure to give any clear lead, he was asked to choose between the alternatives of giving to Czechoslovakia a pledge of help no less binding than that of her two great allies, or dissociating Britain altogether from Central European commitments. He took a middle course, refusing a blank cheque, but insisting on 'the profound disturbance of international confidence', reaffirming more explicitly than ever before British obligations towards France and Belgium, and, more guardedly, the Covenant obligation, 'which is of more general character but which may have more significance'. While declining any 'automatic' pledge under which His Majesty's Government would cease to be a free agent, he made it quite clear that 'if war broke out, it would be unlikely to be confined to those who have assumed legal obligations. It would be quite impossible to say where it would end and what Government might become involved. This is especially true in the case of two countries like Great Britain and France, with long associations of friendship, with interests closely interwoven, devoted to the same ideals of democratic liberty and determined to uphold them.' This attitude satisfied all save the extremists, and it was gratefully accepted by Dr. Hodža, in a broadcast to the nation, as a proof of Britain's increased interest in Central Europe and therefore as 'a great deed for the consolidation of Europe'.

During the critical period of German invasion France had been without a Government, but one of the first things that M. Blum did on his appointment as Premier was to renew in the most explicit form, in his own name and in that of the new Foreign Minister, M. Paul-Boncour, the assurance that France would honour her engagement towards Czechoslovakia.

If these various pronouncements had a certain sedative effect in the West, it was because the utterances of the inspired German Press passed unnoticed. Not the least significant was that of the *Hamburger Nachrichten* of 15 March, which very pointedly assured Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Italy, and Hungary of German friendship, and then not only excluded Czechoslovakia from the list, but spoke of Prague, hitherto a link in the iron ring of Franco-Soviet policy, as being now exposed to 'the firm grip of the Reich frontiers around Bohemia'. French Imperialism in South-east Europe, the paper added, had been blown away in forty-eight hours by 'the winds of the German spring', and the Little Entente would do well to revise its attitude towards France.

Inside Czechoslovakia the Henlein party was jubilant and warned its Agrarian and Clerical rivals that they had a month in which to accept *Gleichschaltung*, and that after that the list would be closed. There was an undignified stampede on the part of the Activists; Dr. Spina resigned from the Cabinet and died soon afterwards. Only the Social Democrats stood firm; for them, as for the Communists, there could be no compromise, but only submission and extermination at the hands of the totalitarians. One of the Catholic leaders, Dr. Hilgenreiner, on his surrender, still claimed that there could be no question of recognizing National Socialism 'in so far as it means certain ethical

and religious ideas'; but within a fortnight he was already declaring that 'The question which concerns us is not, "Are you a Catholic, a Protestant, a free-thinker?" but solely, "Are you a German?"' German Bohemia was a prey to mass hysteria, so incredible that crowds of women kissed the running-boards of Henlein's car or the bed where he had slept on one of his tours. Boys insulted their school-teachers or mockingly pointed out to the police the lamp-posts on which Hitler would hang them!

The logical outcome of this ferment was Herr Henlein's speech at Karlsbad on 24 April. Of the eight points on which, in his phrase, 'the legal order of the State has to be reconstructed', several had already been conceded in principle by the Czechs—as, for instance, full equality of status between Czech and German, full self-government for the German districts, legal protection for every citizen living outside his own national territory, and the appointment of German officials in German areas. But others, such as the recognition of the Sudeten Germans as 'a legal personality', and their right to confess 'German political philosophy'—in other words, National Socialism—would, if conceded, have involved the creation of a State within the State—a totalitarian sub-State inside a democratic State. And the demand for a revision of Czech foreign policy and the abandonment of any attempt to make of Czechoslovakia 'a bulwark against Germanism', were of course equivalent to a claim, on the part of a minority, to impose a complete reversal of the internal and external system, on which she had been founded and had hitherto rested. As, however, these last two points were not included among, but supplementary to, the Eight Points, it was still possible to hope for a compromise

within the framework of domestic policy, and therefore negotiations continued between the Hodža Government and the Henlein party.

What destroyed the last pretence that the Sudeten question was an internal, and not an international, problem, were the events of 21 May. The Karlsbad speech had been very largely determined by the Prague Government's decision to hold municipal elections on three Sundays in May and June, and Henlein's aim, in which he had considerable success, was to stampede the rank and file of the German Activists into his own camp. A week before the elections began, however, he paid a visit to London, under circumstances which have not yet been cleared up. As on previous occasions, he was full of assurances that he was not really a Nazi, that Karlsbad was not necessarily the last word, but that if Czechoslovakia failed to come to terms with him they would soon have to deal with less moderate elements.<sup>1</sup> At the time it was thought that the warnings conveyed to him by Mr. Winston Churchill and other political realists had made an impression upon him; but it is now known that on the contrary he returned from London much more impressed by the views conveyed to him from the entourage of the Prime Minister and from such newspapers as *The Times* and *Observer*, to the effect that Britain was not directly interested in Czechoslovakia. In Mr. Garvin's words, there must be 'complete reform of the composite State, on the principles declared by the Czechs themselves at Versailles', and the Czechs must choose 'between autonomy and separatism'.

It was in the second week of May that Mr. Chamberlain, at the house of Lord Astor, committed himself before a group of American and Canadian journalists,

<sup>1</sup> See *infra*, footnote on p. 56.

to the opinion that neither Britain nor France nor even Russia could fight for the defence of Czechoslovakia even if they wanted to do so, and that Czechoslovakia 'could not survive in its present form', that the Czechs 'must accede to the German demands, if reasonable', and that instead of the 'cantoning now proposed, frontier revision might be advisable'. These views, together with no less startling views on Spain, Italy, and Abyssinia, appeared in an article of Mr. Joseph Driscoll in the *Montreal Daily Star* of 14 May and were described as 'official light on the real British attitude', such as 'cannot be disputed'.<sup>1</sup> In fact its accuracy as a reflection of the Prime Minister's views has never been called in question. We shall not go far wrong in concluding that utter-

<sup>1</sup> In the first edition it was incorrectly stated that this article was never published in Britain. As a result of questions asked by Mr. Geoffrey Mander in the House on 21 June, it was reproduced in the *News Chronicle*. Under such headings as 'Relentlessly Pressing on for Appeasement, Britain Regains her European Leadership', and 'Hitler Regarded as Only Present Menace to Peace', he summarizes the alleged British attitude to various burning European problems, and in particular to the Czech problem, which his informant appears to have described as 'the most dangerous spot in the world'. 'The British in authority' and 'these British' are two of the phrases used; and in their mouth is placed the view that 'there is little danger of immediate war in Europe', because neither France nor Russia *can* fight for the Czechs, for geographical reasons. 'Any suggestion that Russia might fly bombers to Czechoslovakia . . . is ruled out with the comment that Czechoslovakia lacks the necessary equipment and ground facilities for such an additional air force, and that the Russian planes might themselves be bombed to bits before they could take off from Czech territory'. Moreover, 'nothing seems clearer', in Mr. Driscoll's view, 'than that the British do not expect to fight for Czechoslovakia and do not anticipate that France or Russia will either'. They do not feel sure as to Germany's actual intentions, despite the Führer's call 'for the incorporation of all Germans within the greater Reich', and they 'have not made up their official mind as to whether the cantoning of Czechoslovakia is the wisest solution'. But they are 'convinced' that Czechoslovakia, not being a homogeneous country, 'cannot survive in its present form', and 'therefore the Czechs should be practical and make the best terms with Hitler without any wars at all'. Here is already the germ of *The Times* article of 7 September, see *infra*, p. 54.

ances such as these had a decisive influence upon Hitler and Ribbentrop, and their useful little puppet Henlein.

It is quite true that in the last week of April the French and British Premiers and Foreign Ministers had met in London and not only reached apparent agreement—on Mediterranean co-operation and the necessity of further staff talks—but also agreed upon parallel diplomatic action in favour of a German-Czech *détente*. But the effect of this was more than counter-balanced by the vague project of an Anglo-Italian agreement, presented to Parliament by Mr. Chamberlain as a 'Policy of Appeasement'.

Further signs of weakness and disarray became only too obvious during the session of the League Council at Geneva. Lord Halifax, in particular, spoke as a true casuist when he denied that recognition of Italian conquest 'impinged on principle', and when of the two ideals—those of 'devotion to some high purpose' and of 'a practical victory for peace'—he declared the latter to possess a stronger claim. There are many who felt this pronouncement from a devout practising Christian to be a blow at the very basis of Christianity. His attitude to non-intervention in Spain was scarcely less deplorable, and the only useful outcome of the whole session—the Swiss declaration of neutrality—was in itself a flagrant instance of the diminished authority of the League. Mr. Churchill was fully entitled to speak of Lord Halifax's 'week of helplessness and humiliation' at Geneva, less than three years after Britain had stood before the world as the leader of the League and its ideals. Even these stinging comments were of no avail. On 18 May in the House of Lords he returned to his old argument and refused to hesitate between 'the high purpose only



to be achieved by war' and 'the practical victory for peace'. This was 'really a question of political judgment, and not of the eternal and immutable verities'. These abstractions did nothing to dispel the fog that was settling upon Downing Street.

### *The Crisis of 21 May*

Meanwhile the two central Dictators, meeting in Rome on 7 May, poured out their scorn on 'the Utopias to which Europe had blindly entrusted her fate', and without any undue modesty glorified the Fascist and Nazi States as standing 'for order and healthy progress in a world of unrest and decay. Germany and Italy have thus similar interests and are closely bound to one another by their common ideology. In this way there has been created in Europe a block of 120 million people, resolved to safeguard their eternal right to live and to defend themselves against all forces which might oppose their natural development.'

It was in this mood of overweening confidence that the Führer returned to Germany and decided on immediate action. German troops began to concentrate on the Bavarian and Saxon borders; and secret information supplied to the Czech staff, but also to the intelligence service of more than one other country, made it clear that a lightning attack upon Czechoslovakia was intended. President Beneš and his Cabinet, instead of replying with instant mobilization, as their generals advised, waited till the last moment compatible with safety and then, on the night of 20-21 May, ordered a partial concentration of forces which, being carried through with rapidity and smoothness, rendered a surprise attack henceforth impossible. Meanwhile they communicated

with the Western Cabinets, and Lord Halifax on the Saturday warned the new German Ambassador, on lines very similar to Mr. Chamberlain's statement of 24 March, of the dangers to European peace if Czechoslovakia should be attacked. This would appear to have been more effective than the series of encounters between Herr von Ribbentrop and Sir Nevile Henderson, at Berlin, though there a comedy of errors helped to save the situation.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile the French Foreign Minister, M. Bonnet, repeated the former pledges to Czechoslovakia in an even more categorical form, while the spokesman of the Quai d'Orsay was allowed to announce that 'if Germany crosses the Czech frontier, that will automatically start war, and France will furnish help to the uttermost'.

On the one hand the German inspired Press launched a series of indignant denials of mobilization, denounced the 'provocations' of the 'war party' in Prague, and accused Britain of propagating a legend in order to assume later 'the crown of glory as saviours of peace'.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand there was an unwise tendency in part of the British Press to celebrate 'a mythical British diplomatic victory'.<sup>3</sup> A certain balance was struck by *The Times* of 23 May, which after recalling the assurances of Goring and Neurath to Mastný,

<sup>1</sup> A British resident in Berlin had some days before the crisis booked sleeping-berths for his family to go to England on holiday, and on the critical Saturday a member of the Embassy staff, who wished his children to travel in their company, telephoned for extra berths. The booking-clerk drew the conclusion that the Embassy was preparing for a rupture of relations, and the German Foreign Office also took it as a proof that we meant business. In reality, the British Ambassador 'was so alarmed at this interpretation being put upon the train incident, that he immediately ordered the women and children to remain where they were'.—GRANT DUFF, *Europe and the Czechs*, p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 May

<sup>3</sup> *Observer*, 29 May. Mr. Garvin spoilt a good phrase by adding the words 'over sinister German plans'.

argued that 'the Czech Government is thus wholly committed to a drastic solution of the internal difficulty; and if any external complication should arise with the Reich, both Germany and Czechoslovakia are bound by the Treaty of 1925 to resort to arbitration for its settlement'. Meanwhile it is difficult to imagine a greater contrast than that between the frantic outbursts of the German Press against 'the bestial Czechs' and their 'truest friends, the Bolshevik murder rabble in the Kremlin', and the dignified and conciliatory broadcasts of President Beneš, appealing for calm nerves and restraint in these difficult times, or of Dr. Hodža reaffirming the Government's readiness to negotiate a Nationalities Statute, for 'equals among equals'. The constant danger of local incidents starting a political avalanche was illustrated by the shooting of two Sudeten German motor-cyclists by a Czech frontier guard, when they disregarded his order to stop. That the men were political contrabandists was scarcely in dispute, yet their funeral was magnified into a Pan-German demonstration on a large scale, and there was much loose talk of a 'terror', and of the Government's inability to maintain order, though in reality those who spoke thus were all the time engaged in wholesale intimidation of the non-Nazi elements among the German population. Highly significant also was the interview given by Henlein to Mr. Ward Price,<sup>1</sup> in which he indicated three possible alternatives—(a) to give the Sudeten Germans all they asked for; (b) to give them a plebiscite for or against union with Germany; or (c) to have a war, which would be 'simpler still'. This was too much even for the Berlin Government, which banned the interview in the German Press, and when Herr Henlein's Press agents tried to back

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Mail*, 26 May.

out of what they called 'a free and unauthorized rendering of a talk', Mr. Price was able to use his very considerable influence in Nazi circles to extract from Henlein himself a lame and suspicious apology. 'I regret that the mutual interest of our talk led on, through a long discussion of the concrete problems of the moment, to a survey of the theoretically possible development of the Sudeten German question.' This incident provided fresh proof, if any were needed, of the complete insincerity of Herr Henlein's attitude.

It would be absurd for outside observers to claim insight into the innermost plans and intentions of the Führer, but so much may safely be affirmed—that on 21 May he and his advisers realized that Czechoslovakia and Beneš could not be treated like Austria and Schuschnigg, that force would be met by force and that in that event there was a very real prospect of Czechoslovakia's allies in the West and East fulfilling their solemn and reiterated pledges and consequently of Britain, and in the end even America, becoming involved in the conflict. It is an open secret that the more radical leaders of the National Socialist Party were ready to take this risk, but that the Army chiefs took the opposite view. Between the two groups Herr von Ribbentrop continued to assure the Führer that those in authority in Britain were half-hearted in their attitude towards Central European problems, and could almost certainly be relied upon to climb down at the last moment. Certain it is that the Reich now modified its tactics: the military measures already taken were maintained but not extended, the blasts of Press and radio propaganda against Prague continued at regular intervals, but the Henlein party was encouraged on the path of intricate and protracted negotiations with Prague, while a waiting attitude was

adopted towards London's attempts at mediation. A determined attempt was made to confuse the public mind in France, through the medium of certain notorious Press organs. On the Czech side there was a marked revival of confidence; public opinion stood unanimously behind the Government's purely defensive policy, accepting the need for wide concessions to the 'nationalities' and taking the loyalty of its allies altogether for granted; the calling up of the reserves had worked even more efficiently than the General Staff itself had hoped; there had been no malingering even among the minorities; the authority of the State had soon reasserted itself in the frontier districts, and the Sokol celebrations<sup>1</sup> early in July were the outward and visible sign of national solidarity.

### *The British Attitude to Czechoslovakia*

During this brief period of suspense the British official attitude towards Central Europe remained vague. Already on 7 May the British and French Ministers in Prague had made a joint *démarche* to Dr. Krofta, urging concessions 'to the utmost limit of possibility', but no attempt was made to define these limits, and Mr. R. A. Butler admitted in the House of Commons that no particular concessions had been proposed. Soon after the crisis of 21 May, however, Britain first suggested the appointment of an impartial commission of inquiry, and when this was rejected by the Germans, suggested asking the Czechs for permission to send British observers to the Sudeten districts. This was treated by *Diplomatische Korrespondenz*, the Nazi news agency, as 'intended to restore

<sup>1</sup> The Sokol gymnastic society played a notable role in the Czech national revival last century, and in the Great War was a nucleus of the Czechoslovak Legions, which were in their turn the germ of the new army. Their sixtieth anniversary in 1938 was celebrated on an unprecedented scale

the reputation for objectivity tarnished eight days earlier<sup>1</sup>.

During July the British attitude underwent a curious change. Hitherto it had consisted in urging the Prague Government to rapid action, and this had undoubtedly contributed to the decision of President, Premier, Foreign Minister, and Cabinet to lay a new Nationalities Statute before Parliament by the third week of July at latest, and to publish and pass it instantly into law, whether it had been accepted by the Henlein delegates or not.<sup>1</sup> Now, on the contrary, the British and French Ministers began to urge delay, and the idea was broached of sending an emissary from the outside to Prague, with sufficient authority to serve as buffer between the two parties to the dispute. It is not yet quite clear whether this plan originated in London or Paris: some allege that it was first put to the French during the Royal visit to Paris, others that it first originated with M. Daladier, who favoured a joint Anglo-French *démarche*, others that the British Government had wished to see an 'arbitrator' appointed and that the British Minister, Mr. Newton, acting on instructions, actually proposed this to President Beneš. This was too much for M. Daladier, and in the end a compromise was reached. It was argued that Britain, not being bound by alliance to Czechoslovakia, as was France, was in a more favourable position to intervene, and therefore that the proposed mission should be purely British, but on the other hand that the claim to arbitrate should be abandoned.

To all this there was a highly disquieting background. On the very eve of the Royal visit to Paris on 19 July,

<sup>1</sup> I learned certain details of this plan during the first week of July, in a series of long conversations with President Beneš, Dr. Hodža, and Dr. Krofta, three close personal friends

there arrived in London a confidential emissary of the Führer, Captain Wiedemann—a man whose only qualification for so delicate a diplomatic mission was the accident that Adolf Hitler had been a private in his company during the War. To the surprise and indignation of Fleet Street, no information was vouchsafed to it from official quarters, and the news of the visit was allowed to leak out in the foreign Press. Still stranger was the explanation subsequently offered, namely, that the visit had been arranged in Germany behind the back of Herr von Ribbentrop, and that secrecy was therefore essential until Captain Wiedemann actually reached London! His conversations with Lord Halifax have naturally remained a closely guarded secret; all that is known is that no specific proposals were made on either side, and that the result was entirely negative. But there was no ground for the official optimism affected during the closing week of Parliament—an optimism which was in no way shared by the French Government. M. Daladier, while refusing to believe in 'the fatality of war', had on 12 July affirmed, more categorically than ever, that the 'solemn undertakings we have given to Czechoslovakia are sacred, and cannot be evaded'. There was no obligation on Mr. Chamberlain to make any such pronouncement, since Britain had no treaty obligation towards Czechoslovakia beyond the general pledge under the Covenant; hence, in his speech at the close of the Parliamentary session, he was able to assume a somewhat detached attitude. He denied the charge of 'hustling' the Czechs, while admitting that he had urged them to lay their proposals before Henlein before going with them to Parliament; no great pressure was needed, he added, to make the Czechs 'do what they were anxious to do all along'. He then announced

that Lord Runciman was going to Prague, 'not in any sense as an arbitrator', but as 'an investigator and mediator', independent of all Governments and acting 'only in his personal capacity'. In certain respects the speech was unhappily worded, for it was inaccurate to say that the appointment was made 'in response to a request from the Government of Czechoslovakia', since no such request had been made; and again, with all due respect for Lord Runciman's many eminent qualities, it is quite impossible to admit that he answered to the Premier's definition of 'a person with the necessary experience and qualities', since he had no previous acquaintance with the country, and its problems and languages. The House of Lords got nearer to the heart of the matter next day, when the Foreign Secretary had the amazing naïveté to quote Lord Runciman's own phrase, 'You are setting me adrift in a small boat in mid-Atlantic', and to endorse it as an accurate description. There followed the even more naïve opinion that 'a public man of British race' (what would the Fuhrer make of a British 'race?') 'and steeped in British experience and thought, may have it in his power for that reason to make a contribution of quite particular value'. Lord Halifax showed himself to be entirely blind to what lay behind the intricacies of Sudeten German demands, namely, the Reich's resolve to overthrow the last stronghold of democracy in Central Europe and the main obstacle to her own expansion eastwards.

The two Houses entered the recess in a spirit of utterly false optimism, and no one challenged the Prime Minister's amazing remark that the atmosphere was lighter and 'that throughout the Continent there is a relaxation of that sense of tension which six months ago was present'. Only a few publicists murmured to



themselves the ill-omened phrases of Lord Granville and Marshal Lebœuf on the eve of the Franco-German War of 1870.

### *The Runciman Mission*

In reality the European situation at the end of July was increasingly grave. Germany had decided upon military manœuvres on an altogether unprecedented scale, requisitioned cars and lorries all over the country, began to accumulate reserves of food, transferred hundreds of thousands of workmen on special jobs from one part of Germany to the other, and made no concealment of her vast efforts to speed up the construction of defensive fortifications along the western frontier, as a counter to the French Maginot Line. These measures, and the crop of alarming rumours to which they gave rise, were one, though by no means the only, cause of the double slump on the Berlin Bourse on 18 July and 9 August. The Reich Minister of Economics, Dr. Funk, was fully justified in ascribing this slump to a combination of factors, among them the sale of Jewish securities, the increased cash requirements of German industry (due in its turn to extension of plant under the Four Year Plan and to the new official policy of credit restriction<sup>1</sup>), and certain important changes in financial technique. But of course much the most remarkable feature was the fact that for some weeks financial control seemed to be slipping out of the hands of one of the most authoritarian and centralist régimes in Europe. During the next two months the German political and military offensive absorbed all attention; but nothing could banish the financial spectre from the background of the stage, and the new method of 'Government by Pogrom' adopted

<sup>1</sup> See article in *Bulletin of International News*, No. 17, pp. 3-4.

within a few weeks of the Munich 'settlement', was a fresh sign of the latent financial crisis. Those plans for the virtual confiscation of Jewish wealth in Germany which had already been in preparation during the early summer, but which, in view of the July slump, the Government had found it inadvisable to pursue, were taken up again with a ruthlessness which is to be explained not so much by racial theories as by urgent need of plunder for the replenishing of depleted coffers.

On the details of the Runciman Mission it would be unprofitable to enter. Its aims were to tranquillize, to mediate, perhaps to gain time; but it was faced by a gradual exacerbation of the internal situation with which the negotiations between Czechs and Germans were never able to keep pace. While the Reich continued its intensive wireless campaign, the situation was always at the mercy of some trumped-up local incident, such as the tavern brawl in which a drunken Czech brought down his beer mug on the skull of a drunken German, and killed him on the spot. The Sudeten leaders were playing a dilatory game, and when on 18 August Herr Henlein at last deigned to meet Lord Runciman, by a tactical blunder the meeting took place at the castle of Prince Egon Hohenlohe, a citizen of the Reich and a convert to Nazi doctrine—with the result that the Czechs were offended and the Henleinists rendered more arrogant. Meanwhile a Sudeten German Legion was being formed across the German border, on lines similar to the notorious Austrian Legion directed against Dollfuss; and inside German Bohemia an organization named F.S. (Freiwillige Selbstschutz) was also taking shape, avowedly modelled on the German S.A. and S.S. formations and in close touch with the Gestapo or secret police. On 26 August the Sudeten Party went so far as to issue a

proclamation setting its members 'free to act in self-defence when attacked', in view of 'the acts of provocation' to which they were exposed. This crude encouragement to fresh violence was welcomed in the Reich Press, which published daily long lists of trifling local incidents, and warned Lord Runciman that he must go all the way on the path of autonomy. Dr. Silex in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* expressed great anxiety that Czechoslovakia should not become another Spain or Palestine.

We now know, from Mr. Chamberlain's speech of 28 September, that during August—strictly speaking between 26 July and 1 September—no less than four representations were made by the British Ambassador in Berlin, to the effect that Germany's military preparations might not only endanger the success of the Runciman Mission, but even the peace of Europe. He was even told to point out that such 'abnormal measures could not fail to be interpreted abroad as a threatening gesture towards Czechoslovakia'.<sup>1</sup>

This was of course as yet unknown to the public, but on the 28th Sir John Simon, speaking at Lanark, made references to the crisis which, for all their general character, revealed the Government's growing anxiety. In a series of initial platitudes he declared that 'war is never inevitable if all nations alike will do their utmost to remove the causes', and then, reaffirming the Prime Minister's statement of 24 March, he added that it was 'impossible to assume a limit to the disturbance that a conflict would involve'. On the same day Mr. Churchill struck a firmer note, first emphasizing the financial strain which two months of a war footing were imposing upon the Reich, and refusing to believe that Herr Hitler would 'cast away all he had done for

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, cccxxvix, No. 160, p. 8.

the German people by leading them into what would almost certainly become a world war'.

Meanwhile official alarm in London was reflected almost day by day by *The Times*, by now the chief organ of Mr. Chamberlain's policy. On the 25th it stressed the scale of the German manœuvres and the persistence of anti-Czech propaganda; on the 29th it got the length of admitting that 'success depends upon the action and spirit of the minorities, in particular of the Sudeten Germans, as well as of the Czechs'; on the 31st it declared that 'Britain can see no case for a breach of relations between Berlin and Prague', or for the former's Press campaign and military measures. The German Press treated the Simon speech as merely encouraging Prague in its obstinate procrastination;<sup>1</sup> and this patent misrepresentation contributed to a very marked stiffening of the London, and still more of the provincial, Press.

At this point we first become conscious of a sinister influence in Paris, which many well-informed Frenchmen connect with the Foreign Minister, M. Bonnet, but which still remains obscure. Three days before the Lanark speech Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Halifax, and Sir John Simon had met to discuss the foreign situation, and the *Daily Mail* announced that the Cabinet was about to promise support to France in the event of her fulfilling her obligations to Czechoslovakia. Next day the Deutsches Nachrichten Bureau (the German official Press agency) published a *démenti* of this 'from an official source' in London. It soon transpired that no such official statement was given out, but that almost at the same moment the French official agency Havas had published a statement of

<sup>1</sup> In the words of the Berlin correspondent of *The Times*, the speech was received in Berlin 'with anger and disappointment'. (29 August)

identical character. It might have been supposed that a French Foreign Minister would welcome any sign of stiffening on the part of London; but it seems that on the contrary M. Bonnet, so far from desiring any such stiffening, had as long ago as 27 July warned the Czechoslovak Government that France could not 'march' unless Britain was at her side. This appears to have been known to London, and the two incidents may have combined to produce a toning down of phrase in the Lanark speech, such as had not at first been intended. This is certainly quite in line with M. Bonnet's subsequent conduct in trying to create an impression, both in London and in Paris, that the Czechs would actually welcome the application of pressure from the West, in order to make surrender easier, when all the time the Czechs were still hoping that their ally would fulfil her ninefold plighted word.

### *The Fourth Plan*

During the first week of September the long discussions were working up to a crisis, and in a certain sense the forthcoming Nazi Rally at Nürnberg and the inevitable programme speech of the Führer loomed as a kind of time limit, within which the final decision must be reached. Round this centred all the complicated discussions of autonomy (whether on purely racial or mainly administrative lines), local self-government, the Swiss cantonal system, and so on. Among a host of other difficulties, whose discussion would lead much too far afield and destroy all hope of general perspective, were the two basic facts: (a) that the Nazi tendency to treat 'State' and 'nation' as virtually co-terminous was an insuperable obstacle to any accord between a totalitarian and a democratic system within the framework of a single State, and

(b) that the German minority in Bohemia fell into six or eight distinct groups, and that any attempt to administer them as a single unit was bound to fail. It was with this in mind that in July the Hodža Cabinet had drafted its 'Nationalities Statute', supplemented by an administrative Reform Bill and an amended Language Law; and now on 5 September it adopted the so-called 'Fourth Plan'. Without entering into the details of this unhappily stillborn project, it will suffice to say that in Lord Runciman's opinion (and, as he believed, 'of the more responsible Sudeten leaders') 'this plan embodied almost all the requirements of the Karlsbad Eight Points, and with a little clarification and extension could have been made to cover them in their entirety'.<sup>1</sup> Unhappily he was most certainly not exaggerating when he went on to affirm that this favourable prospect 'did not suit the policy of the Sudeten extremists', and that incidents were deliberately provoked with a view to causing a breakdown. As it has sometimes been insinuated that the ulterior motive of the Runciman Mission had from the very first been the more drastic solution which was eventually adopted, it is necessary to state that no proof of this has ever been adduced; and in the opinion of competent observers on the spot its members were, during the critical week following the Hodža plan, genuinely working for its realization, and for the first time optimistic in feeling. They were, however, only too conscious that at such a moment 'a breath might upset the card house' in which they lived.

In view of simultaneous happenings in London, it is perhaps not surprising that suspicions, however unfounded, of deliberate sabotage should have arisen. On 7 September *The Times* published a leader bearing

<sup>1</sup> White Paper, No 1, p 4.

self-evident signs of composite writing. After a very fair survey of the situation between the Czechs and Germans, culminating in the admission that 'no central Government would still deserve its title if it did not reserve in its own hands Defence, Foreign Policy, and Finance', it suddenly went on, 'If the Sudetens are not satisfied with the last Czech offer, it can only be inferred that they do not find themselves at ease within the Republic. In that case it might be well for the Czechoslovak Government to consider whether a solution should not be sought on some totally different lines, which would make Czechoslovakia an entirely homogeneous State by the secession of that fringe of alien populations who are contiguous to the nations with which they are united by race.' Thus the policy adumbrated in the *Montreal Star* in May emerged into the full light of British day. It is true that an official denial that cession of territory represented the policy of the British Government was at once issued by the Foreign Office, and actually reaffirmed from Downing Street—a most unusual procedure. But the mischief was already done, and German official circles convinced themselves that the denial need not be taken at its face value, or alternately that its authors would give way, if sufficiently pressed; while at the same time the Sudeten leaders were given to understand that the attitude of *The Times* was more representative of British policy than the efforts of the Runciman Mission. An incident was therefore at once created at Moravska Ostrava (when investigated by an official British observer it proved to be quite trivial), and used as a pretext for the suspension of the negotiations. The extreme forbearance of the Czech Government led to a brief resumption, but on the 13th Henlein and Frank again drew back and presented new demands. The real

reason of this was that on the 12th Herr Hitler, in his Nurnberg speech, had made a violent attack upon Czechoslovakia and in particular upon President Beneš, whom he accused of 'torturing' the Sudeten Germans, systematically reducing them to economic ruin and seeking to 'exterminate' them altogether. Germany, he declared, could not be indifferent to their fate and demanded the right of self-determination on their behalf. Despite much violence of phrase, however, there was no suggestion that negotiations should be abandoned; the existence of a threat was obvious, but there was as yet no indication of its nature.

The next word, however, lay with Herr Henlein, who on 14 September rejected both the Fourth Plan and even his own Karlsbad Points, proclaimed an openly separatist programme without even waiting to consult his own Executive Committee, and then precipitately fled to Germany. All pretence of that loyalty to the Czechoslovak State which he had so constantly affirmed, and never more insistently than in conversation with British acquaintances,<sup>1</sup> was now dropped,

<sup>1</sup> I may be allowed to quote my own talks with Herr Henlein. On four separate occasions (twice in October 1935 in London, and twice in January 1936 in Prague) we discussed the German-Czech question at great length, on the basis of (1) the indivisibility of the Bohemian lands, (2) the possibility of a settlement within the framework of the Czechoslovak constitution; (3) repudiation of the totalitarian principle and of anti-Semitism; (4) denial of all connexion with Herr Hitler; (5) insistence that Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism must lead with equal certainty to a catastrophe, and (6) acceptance of the democratic principles of Masaryk. I still believe that at that time he still meant what he said, and I do not presume to say when exactly he became a mere instrument of Hitler. But I know personally more than one Sudeten German of distinction, who believes that this change only took place after the Anschluss.

The reader may judge for himself the extent to which Herr Henlein did actually change, by consulting his address at Chatham House (*International Affairs*, May 1937) and the anonymous article entitled 'The German Minority in Czechoslovakia' in *Slavonic Review*, which was specially written at my invitation as Editor, and on orders from Herr Henlein, by one of his chief deputies.



and an open appeal was made for foreign intervention and a solution by armed force. But events strangely falsified his calculations; nothing that deserves the name of a rebellion took place except in the extreme corner of the Egerland, and the Czech authorities found no difficulty in restoring order within the first two days, without any bloodshed. It is true that not only the hotheads and marked men of the Sudeten party fled across the frontier, but also a certain proportion of the inhabitants in border villages; but this was not because of any 'Czech Terror' (which, if it had existed, would have prevented such a flight), but above all from fear of being caught between the two armies in the impending conflict. Among the able-bodied fugitives Henlein at once began to form a Sudeten Legion, on similar lines to the Austrian Legion of 1933, but with cadres strengthened by S.S. and S.A. men from the Reich. He also broadcast a frantic appeal against 'the reign of terror of the Bolshevik Hussite criminals in Prague', but declared the hour of liberation to be near.

When it was seen that there was neither rebellion nor invasion a fresh revulsion of feeling came over the nerve-racked Sudeten population; for one brief moment Activism again began to raise its head, and leaders of moderate opinion even in the Sudeten German Party, freed from the incubus of a few extremists, prepared to resume negotiations with the Prague Government, this time on a *German* all-party basis. During the next few days not merely was Czech and Slovak opinion more united behind the Government than ever before or since, but such portents occurred as a deputation to President Beneš representing what remains of the ancient Bohemian feudal nobility,<sup>1</sup> which had hitherto

<sup>1</sup> Including such famous names as Kinsky, Kolowrat, Sternberg, Lobkowitz, Schwarzenberg, Czernin, Colloredo, Belcredi, Strachwitz

held aloof from the Republic, but now wished to express its belief in that unity of Bohemia which had survived over a thousand years of national disagreements. If only further interference from outside could have been averted, there was a real prospect of a definite settlement being reached within a week.

### *Berchtesgaden*

Unhappily the very opposite occurred. We have Mr. Chamberlain's authority for the statement that the Führer 'was contemplating an immediate invasion of Czechoslovakia'<sup>1</sup> and the assertion of Herr Goebbels,<sup>2</sup> since confirmed by the Führer himself, already on 28 May he fixed 2 October as the date for invasion. The atmosphere already so tense that the British Premier resolved to take the unconventional but courageous step of himself paying an urgent visit to the Führer and trying to reach a compromise such as might still avert war. This resolve fired the imagination of world opinion and was the real basis of the popularity which the subsequent development brought to Mr. Chamberlain. It may very well be true that, as he himself believes, only his action did in actual fact avert war. Public opinion, in its intense relief, did not stop to ask whether he possessed the necessary qualifications for tête-à-tête bargaining with Hitler, or whether he was wise in dispensing with the services not only of the Foreign Secretary, but also of all the permanent chiefs of the Foreign Office, and in relying upon a civil servant of high distinction in other spheres, but as ill-equipped as himself for dealing with high politics in Central Europe. Moreover, we know from his own admission that it was only on meeting the Führer that he realized how 'acute' and 'urgent' the position was—which is another way of

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, 28 September, p. 24

<sup>2</sup> Speech of 19 November 1938.

saying that he had not been kept fully informed by his advisers, or had not studied their information—for that British and French military and diplomatic circles were fully aware of the extreme gravity of the position during August and September, there can be no manner of doubt. It was on this occasion that the Führer 'declared that rather than wait he would be prepared to risk a world war', and that the Prime Minister made it clear that he was 'evidently wasting his time' in travelling so far.<sup>1</sup>

### *Lord Runciman's 'Volte-face'*

Mr. Chamberlain had flown to Berchtesgaden on 15 September, and a day later Lord Runciman left Prague; the fateful decision was not, therefore, based upon a report from the latter. But meanwhile Lord Runciman also was taking his own decision, which was bound to carry weight with the British Cabinet when it was submitted to them. And this decision amounted to a complete *volte-face*, for which as yet no explanation has been forthcoming, and which becomes still more inexplicable in the light of his own official report of 21 September.<sup>2</sup> Having accepted the constitutional and territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia as the basis of his mediation, having eventually accepted the Fourth Plan as perfectly just and workable, and as compatible with the Sudeten programme, and having laid the full blame upon Henlein and Frank, by name, for the failure of the negotiations, he suddenly, after the flight of Henlein, and at the very moment when the Government had demonstrated its control of the situation, throws over his whole past, and advocates 'a policy of immediate and drastic action'—in other words, 'the transfer of predominantly German districts' to

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, 28 September, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> 2 White Paper, No. 1.

Germany, without any such formality as a plebiscite, on the assumption that this accords with the demand for self-determination. Yet within a few sentences of this proposal he had admitted that a hard and fast separation of German and Czech was impossible, that 'economic connexions are so close that an absolute separation is *not only undesirable but inconceivable*', and that 'history has proved that in times of peace the two peoples can live together on friendly terms'. How did two such contradictory views obtain entry in the same report, and were they passed for press by some one who failed to recognize the contradictions? Lord Runciman certainly owes the nation an explanation of his sudden conversion, and it must be added quite flatly that no newcomer, however distinguished, has the right to pronounce sentence of life and death on a whole country of which he has only had a few weeks' experience.

No more effective comment on the Mission is to be found than in the brilliant article of Mr. Fish Armstrong, editor of *Foreign Affairs* (the organ of the American Council on Foreign Relations and the best review of foreign affairs in the whole world). Writing of the report of Lord Runciman to the British Government, he says:

'Lord Runciman discourages a plebiscite as tending to prolong uncertainty. He notes that "a large number" of Germans would of course remain in Czechoslovakia, and "a certain number" of Czechs in areas transferred to Germany. For the Germans he recommends local autonomy on the lines of the Fourth Plan. About the Czechs to be transferred to Germany he is silent; apparently they were to sink or swim as best they could in the Nazi sea, and the less said about them the better. His advice in this

respect evidently commended itself to Chamberlain, for that was precisely the fate eventually reserved for the Czechs in Sudeten areas and for all the other political or racial minorities there. The Germans remaining in Czechoslovakia, a country whose twenty-year record for the treatment of minorities was the best in Europe, were much on Lord Runciman's mind. For almost a million Czechs, German Liberals, and "race enemies" whom he recommended turning over to Hitler, whose record for ferocious mistreatment of every opponent, active or passive, is without parallel, not a thought, not a line, not a word.<sup>1</sup>

The meeting between the Premier and the Führer took place without the former attempting to obtain, or at any rate succeeding in obtaining, any 'suspension of provocative utterance' on the part of the German Press and radio. On the contrary, this was still further intensified, the *Völkische Beobachter* raving against 'the criminal Beneš' and demanding complete separation as 'the only cure for the Versailles disease', while other papers enlarged upon the 'bloodthirsty atrocities' of the Czechs and began to demand 'the liquidation of the Czechoslovak State'. We have the authority of Mr. Duff Cooper, the occupant of a key position in the Cabinet, for the statement that 'the Prime Minister went to Berchtesgaden with many excellent and reasonable proposals and alternatives to put before the Führer, prepared to argue and negotiate, as any one would have gone to such a meeting. *He was met by an ultimatum.* So far as I am aware, no suggestion of an alternative was ever put forward. . . . He returned with proposals wrapped up in a cloak called 'self-determination', and laid them before the Cabinet.

<sup>1</sup> *Foreign Affairs*, January 1939, p. 233

They meant the partition of a country, the cession of territory; they meant what, when it was suggested by a newspaper some days before, had been indignantly repudiated throughout the country.’<sup>1</sup> (And he might have added, by the Government’s own *communiqué* of September.)

### *The Anglo-French Plan*

Mr. Chamberlain, then, returned from Berchtesgaden on Friday, 16 September, prepared to submit to the ultimatum, and not prepared to comply with Mr. Duff Cooper’s urgent advice that the British Fleet should be mobilized. He hurriedly invited the French Premier and Foreign Minister, MM. Daladier and Bonnet, to confer with him on the Sunday. The result was that by midnight or very soon after, the so-called Anglo-French Plan was drafted and transmitted to the Czech Government for acceptance, without their previous consultation and in direct disregard of President Beneš’s urgent appeal that no decision should be taken by the two Governments without his having a chance of comment. The main features of the Plan were that all districts mainly inhabited by Germans (in effect those containing over 50 per cent of Germans—a decision resting on the grotesquely naive assumption that all Sudeten Germans must be supporters of Henlein and of union with the Reich) should be at once transferred to the Reich without any plebiscite or other means of testing opinion; that the details should be settled by ‘some international body’ (*un organisme international* is even vaguer) including a Czech representative; and that ‘as a contribution to the pacification of Europe’, a general guarantee of the new frontier ‘against unprovoked aggression’ should be substituted

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, No 161, 3 October, p. 35

'for the treaties actually in vigour' (that is, those about to be repudiated), 'which would involve reciprocal obligations of a military character'. The extent of the sacrifices demanded of Czechoslovakia is recognized, but it is argued that any other course would 'imperil the interests of Czechoslovakia herself and of European peace'. Incidentally, there is a curious difference between the English and French texts: 'we should hope to arrange by negotiation provisions for the adjustment of frontiers', is a much more euphonious version than '*nous avons tout lieu d'espérer d'obtenir*' (from whom? from Hitler?) '*un ajustement des frontières*', which can only mean that they were relying on Germany's future consent, but had no certainty of it. Of special interest is the passage in which they assume that the Czechs themselves will prefer 'direct transfer' to plebiscite, in view of 'the possibility of far-reaching repercussions' of the latter method; in other words, they wish to force concessions from the Czechs, but in such a way as to avoid creating awkward precedents in the case of other minorities.

Such proposals, hurriedly drafted by amateurs in London, without consulting any one on the spot in Prague, came as a deadly blow to the Czechoslovak Government and drove it to a most earnest protest. In their reply they urged upon the two Western Powers the altogether unconstitutional and anti-democratic aspects of the case, arguing that to accept drastic revision of frontiers without reference to Parliament would inevitably 'affect the democratic régime of the country and its juridical system'. It would be 'tantamount to mutilation of the State', its whole economic life and its communications would be 'completely paralysed', its strategic position would be threatened, and it would 'very quickly come under the absolute

influence of Germany'. This would involve profound political changes in Central and Southern Europe and the destruction of the whole balance of power. While cordially thanking the British Government for its offer of a guarantee, they pointed out that that Government had itself 'underlined the fact that a solution should be found within the framework of the Czechoslovak constitution—a basis which not even the Sudeten German Party had rejected during its discussions with Prague'. They appealed to the German-Czechoslovak Arbitration Treaty of 16 October 1926, which the Reich had on several occasions (and as recently as March 1938) recognized as still in force. They concluded with 'a supreme appeal' to the two Governments 'to reconsider their attitude'.

This Note (which the British Government did not even have the common fairness to include in the White Paper) was simply brushed aside.<sup>1</sup> The Plan—itsself, as we saw, based on a veiled ultimatum of the Führer to the Prime Minister—had been presented in the form of an ultimatum to Czechoslovakia, in defiance of all democratic practices, and with a time limit shorter than that accorded by Austria-Hungary in her ultimatum to Serbia in August 1914.

It is no exaggeration to describe this as the most formidable demand ever addressed by a British Government to a friendly nation in time of peace, and the Prime Minister may be challenged to produce from the history of our foreign policy any document so humiliating and so contrary to the spirit of our country. It is characteristic that the terms were withheld from publication in London, though the Prague Correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* and the Paris Correspondent of *The Times* were able to indicate their main lines; the

<sup>1</sup> The full text will be found in Appendix A.



Diplomatic Correspondent of the former paper was unable to obtain either denial or confirmation of the report that cession applied to districts with 50 per cent of Germans. Presumably it was the fog generated by this official reticence that made it possible for *The Times* in its leader of 20 September to make this ineffable understatement: 'The general character of the terms submitted to the Czech Government *for their consideration* cannot in the nature of things be expected to make a strong *prima facie* appeal to them, and least of all to President Beneš'!

### *The Midnight Ultimatum*

The worst part of the story still remains to be told. MM. Daladier and Bonnet, on returning to Paris, had laid the Anglo-French Plan before their Cabinet, and obtained its sanction only subject to two important conditions—first, that no pressure should be exercised upon Prague, and, second, that if Prague refused, the Franco-Czech Treaty should still remain valid. There was thus a dissentient minority of six Ministers inside the Cabinet, including MM. Paul Reynaud, Campinchi, and Mandel, and this explains M. Bonnet's caution and embarrassment. In London also there was a *fronde* among the younger Ministers, but as they had no representatives in the Inner Cabinet, their resistance was more easily quelled, and in the end only one of them resigned.

At 5 p.m. on Tuesday the 20th M. Krofta handed his Government's refusal of the Note to the French and British Ministers in Prague, M. Lacroix and Mr. Newton; and it was on this occasion that the latter warned him that if Czechoslovakia persisted in her attitude Britain would declare herself 'disinterested'. M. Lacroix, *acting on verbal instructions*, endorsed this warning.

M. Krofta at once reported to the Czechoslovak Cabinet, which at 8 p.m. decided to await definite answers from London and Paris, to its Note. Immediately after the Cabinet rose the Premier, M. Hodža, saw M. Lacroix, and put to him most urgently the question whether France would help—Yes or No? He presumably reminded the Minister that as recently as the 15th France, through its responsible Ministers, had reaffirmed more solemnly than ever her loyalty to engagements. M. Lacroix, reduced to tears by his humiliating position, answered that he had as yet no further official instructions, but that he knew that the answer would be in the negative.

At 1.20 a.m. on Wednesday the 21st, the two Ministers received instructions from London and Paris to make an immediate *démarche*; and at 2 a.m. (3 a.m. by Central European time) President Beneš (who had taken two hours' sleep for the first time for three days) and Dr. Krofta were dragged from their beds and left to hand on to the Cabinet a second and still more peremptory ultimatum. Mr. Newton duly carried out Lord Halifax's instructions<sup>1</sup> and insisted that the Czechoslovak Note 'in no way meets the critical situation' and that the Czech Government should therefore 'withdraw that reply and urgently consider *an alternative that takes account of realities*'. Otherwise Mr. Chamberlain would have to cancel his proposed second flight to Herr Hitler. Prague was therefore begged 'to consider urgently and seriously before producing *a situation for which we could take no responsibility*'. At the same time the British Government declined to lay the Czech proposal for arbitration before the German Government.

<sup>1</sup> The text was communicated by Lord Stanhope and Mr R. A. Butler on 5 October to the two Houses

M. Lacroix then made a *verbal* statement, according to definite instructions from Paris. This culminated in the phrase that 'if Czechoslovakia does not accept unconditionally the Anglo-French Plan, she will be held solely responsible for any war which might result from it, *'la France ne s'y associera pas'*, and Britain will also not help. He therefore urged immediate acceptance. President Beneš made notes of the conversation, but asked that, in view of the vital issues involved, the Ministers should confirm what they had said in writing, and this was done a few hours later; but comparison shows that while Mr. Newton's verbal statement closely follows the words of Lord Halifax's instructions, M. Lacroix's version of what he said was considerably toned down. None the less the essence was there. The British instructions were urbane in form, but the menace behind the crucial phrase is quite unmistakable, while the French version, though omitting the words *'ne s'y associera pas'*, made it perfectly clear that France would not fulfil her obligations if war followed the final Czech rejection.<sup>1</sup> The essential passage of the French document ran as follows:

<sup>1</sup> On 26 September I circulated to all Members of Parliament a memorandum containing a résumé of the three documents mentioned in the text. Of these, the Anglo-French Note was published two days later in the White Paper, while the Czechoslovak Note is not challenged, but of the third (the summary of the 2 a m *démarche*), Sir Samuel Hoare said in the House on 3 October, that it was 'substantially, I might almost say totally, inaccurate', and Mr. R. A. Butler on 5 October read out the actual text of the instructions to Mr. Newton, and seems to have thought that he was refuting my summary. This rests on a misapprehension, for I was summarizing *not* the instructions to one Minister, but the terms in which the two Ministers actually delivered their *démarche*—a very different thing. My summary fell under the four following heads

'1. Britain and France have the duty to prevent an European war if humanly possible, and thus an invasion of Czechoslovakia, (an excellent sentiment, with which no one will quarrel).

'2. They wish the Czech Government to realize that if it does not *unconditionally and at once* accept the Anglo-French Plan, it will stand

'En repoussant la proposition franco-britannique, le Gouvernement tchécoslovaque prend la responsabilité de déterminer le recours à la force de l'Allemagne. Il rompt par là même la solidarité franco-britannique qui vient d'être établie et il enlève ainsi toute efficacité pratique à une assistance de la France.'<sup>1</sup>

Both the Ministers insisted upon extreme urgency. They would not hear of the possibility of referring the question to Parliament or public opinion in any form whatsoever, and they delivered their message in abrupt and wounding terms. Mr. Chamberlain in his speech of 28 September to the House alluded to this in the euphemistic phrase, 'The Czechoslovak Government was urged to accept the Anglo-French proposals immediately.' In plain English, he and his French ally enforced a second and still more categorical ultimatum to Prague—in the words of Mr. Amery, 'with indecent haste and ruthlessness'.

before the world as solely responsible for the war which will ensue (they are thus apparently entirely exonerating the German Government)

'3 By refusing, Czechoslovakia will also be guilty of destroying Anglo-French solidarity, since in that event (presumably in contradiction to her attitude in the event of acceptance) Britain will under no circumstances march, even if France went to the aid of Czechoslovakia.

'4. If the refusal should provoke war, France gives official notice that she will not fulfil her treaty obligations.'

This summary was placed at my disposal at the height of the crisis, and contains the essence of what the two Ministers said. It was only possible to give a *summary*, because my information was based on a cipher telegram, which could not be translated *in extenso*. Mr. Armstrong's version is in almost identical terms (see *Foreign Affairs*, p. 235) and has obviously been translated from the same document, which he obtained 'from highly authoritative sources' (p. 236 n.)

A comparison of these four points with the narrative in the text will show that the only inaccuracy is that what passed at the two separate *démarches* of Tuesday 20th and Wednesday early morning has been telescoped into one.

<sup>1</sup> 'In rejecting the Franco-British proposal, the Czechoslovak Government takes the responsibility of deciding Germany's recourse to force. It thereby breaks the Franco-British solidarity which has just been established, and it thus deprives of all practical value any assistance on the part of France.'

At 6 a.m. the Czechoslovak Cabinet met to consider this ultimatum, and sat for three hours, the decision to surrender being then submitted to all the party leaders. They and the Premier were confronted with a desperate situation; the alliance on which their whole policy rested, and which had been repeatedly reaffirmed up till the previous week, had now been repudiated with a suddenness and a brutality for which it is difficult to find a parallel in history; Britain, though herself without any obligations, had done all in her power to encourage repudiation by France; Russia's obligation was only contingent upon fulfilment by France; Roumania and Jugoslavia were bound to help against Hungary, but not against Germany; and Poland's sinister and aggressive attitude completed the ring of hostile forces around the Republic. To the last there was the possibility that Russia, in response to a direct appeal, might intervene, no longer on the basis of treaty pledges, but simply to save a kindred Slav nation in distress; and there are considerable grounds for believing that such an appeal would not have been disregarded, and that this would have enabled Roumania also to give the support for which she was loyally preparing. But even in their despair the Czechs shrank from the consequences of such a decision, realizing that Nazi Germany would have proclaimed a kind of Holy War of ideologies and would itself have stood forth as the champion of European civilization against Slav Bolshevism, and that this would have fatally divided and paralysed opinion in the Western democracies, especially in view of the enormous Nazi expenditure for the corruption of the Paris Press. Czechoslovakia, already a beleaguered fortress in the military sense, might easily have found herself between the firing lines of two 'ideological' camps in Europe. Her resistance

was broken by a combination of treachery and bullying, and in the afternoon of Wednesday the 21st her acceptance of the Anglo-French Plan was sent to Paris and London.

Not content with breaking their tenfold plighted word, the French Ministers attempted to diminish the shock to public opinion by giving out that President Beneš, the Hodža Cabinet, and even the Czechoslovak General Staff, had all of their own accord invited Paris to put pressure on Prague, as the best means of reconciling hostile Czech opinion to a step which all responsible quarters desired. This was first spread abroad by a close associate of M. Bonnet, M. Émile Roche, in *La République*. As its absurdity in relation to President Beneš was at once obvious, an attempt was made to saddle the story upon M. Hodža; and at the Quai d'Orsay the text of an alleged telegram sent in this sense by M. Lacroix, was shown, at M. Bonnet's instance, to certain French politicians. Now that the story is known to be false, and that the facts have begun to appear in reputable French journals,<sup>1</sup> there have been insistent demands for a French Yellow Book, but so far this has been withheld by the Government.

There appears to have been an excellent reason for circulating such a story. It will be remembered that the Anglo-French Plan had only been accepted by the French Cabinet on condition that there should be no pressure upon Prague. But not merely had this condition not been observed but the final decision in favour of the midnight *démarche*—in other words, the culmination of the whole pressure—had been taken late on Tuesday evening by MM. Bonnet and Daladier, without the rest of the Cabinet being convoked or

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, *L'Europe Nouvelle* for 29 October, and especially a signed article by M. Hubert Beuve-Méry, of the Institut Français in Prague.

consulted—a much more unconstitutional action than the parallel decision of the British Inner Cabinet.<sup>1</sup>

Under the tragic circumstances thus described, President Beneš and the Hodža Cabinet saw no possible course but submission. They had, be it noted, to accept first and let the nation know afterwards—action which has profoundly shaken the cause of democracy in Czechoslovakia. The Government did, however, base its acceptance upon the assumption that there would be no German invasion and no transfer of territory until the International Commission provided for in the Anglo-French Plan had fixed the new frontiers. Amid the rush of events it seems to have been overlooked that no attempt was ever made by Britain and France to make this condition effective; and in actual fact evacuation was made to precede the fixing of the frontiers—an altogether unheard-of method.

The message broadcast to a stupefied nation stated that the Government had been 'exposed to pressure for which there was no precedent in history, and which amounted to a "Diktat" such as is imposed upon a vanquished people. But we are not a vanquished people. We submitted in order to avoid greater losses, misery, and bloodshed. We are sacrificing ourselves to save peace, as Christ sacrificed Himself to save humanity.'

No more eloquent commentary upon the double ultimatum of 18–20 September can be found than the action of General Faucher, a distinguished French officer lent to the Czechoslovak General Staff who, on learning the terms of the 'Diktat', asked to be relieved

<sup>1</sup> Which, *as such*, is unconstitutional and non-existent, but which includes two of the three constitutional factors in foreign policy, the third being the King.

of his French citizenship and to be admitted to that of his adopted country.

Naturally enough the Hodža Government had no course but to resign, and public indignation throughout Czechoslovakia had reached such white heat that for a time a real upheaval was feared. This was only averted by the appointment as Premier of General Sirový—Inspector-General of the Army—a soldier enjoying universal confidence as the strong silent man, the modern Žižka who would save his people. He too, however, took office on the basis of acceptance of the Anglo-French Plan, thus recognizing the situation to be irretrievable save by the hazard of war.

### *Godesberg*

Having forced Prague into submission 'under extreme duress', without discussion, and in direct defiance of the Czech constitution, and having bluntly declined the British Opposition's request that Parliament should be summoned, Mr. Chamberlain on 22 September flew to Godesberg, only to find himself confronted by 'a totally unexpected situation'. Almost as he flew, the inspired German Press was declaring that the Anglo-French Plan and even the terms put forward at Berchtesgaden had been out-distanced by events. The Memorandum now submitted by the Führer to the Premier went far beyond the Berchtesgaden terms. It demanded (1) total evacuation before 1st October (i.e. within a week) of all territory marked on a map appended by the Germans; (2) the immediate discharge of all Germans serving in the Czechoslovak Army, and unilateral release of German political prisoners; (3) a plebiscite, before 25 November, under international control, in other areas 'to be more definitely defined' later; and (4) the handing over



undamaged of all material, military or other, all livestock and goods, inside the evacuated districts.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Chamberlain himself has told us that these demands were a profound shock to him'; that the Führer admitted that he had 'never for one moment supposed' that his visitor would be able to accept the principle of self-determination (which was another way of saying that he was prepared for a rupture), and that at their second talk he himself described Hitler's terms as 'an *ultimatum* rather than a memorandum', and 'bitterly reproached him for his failure to respond'.<sup>2</sup> Despite a day spent on opposite sides of the Rhine, the Führer did not yield an inch, and though the midnight conversation ended on a friendly note, British official circles seem to have felt the situation to be exceedingly grave. The Prague Government was informed from London that day that the British Government could no longer uphold its advice against Czech mobilization, though urging that it should be carried out in as unprovocative a manner as possible. In actual fact Czechoslovakia mobilized at 10.20 p.m. on the 23rd, after making sure that France also did not disapprove: the order was greeted by the entire population with actual relief and enthusiasm, as the awakening from a long nightmare. Indeed, that afternoon, despite a scarcely concealed desire for surrender on the part of M. Flandin outside and M. Bonnet inside the Cabinet, the Premier, M. Daladier, issued yet another 'uncompromising affirmation' that France would fulfil her obligations, if Czechoslovakia were attacked. At Geneva M. Litvinov, on 21, and again on 23 September, reaffirmed Russia's loyalty to her obligations; while the Polish Chargé at Moscow was warned that if Poland attacked Czechoslovakia, Russia would consider

<sup>1</sup> White Paper, No. 6    <sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, 28 September, No. 160, pp 20-21.

the Russo-Polish Treaty of Non-aggression as no longer valid. By this time both Poland and Hungary, and indeed all the lesser Powers, were hastily trimming their sails, to be ready for an instant change of course if the wind should veer.

Late at night on 23-24 September Mr. Chamberlain, on returning to his hotel, was asked whether the situation was hopeless, and replied, 'I would not like to say that. It is up to the Czechs now.'<sup>1</sup> It would seem, then, that he hoped to force a further surrender upon Prague. Certainly he consented to take what he himself called the 'ultimatum' with him and transmit it to the Czechs, presumably as not altogether unacceptable. It also seems certain that Mr. Chamberlain made no attempt, throughout the long crisis, to obtain from the Germans even a temporary cessation of their official campaign of hate and lies against the 'bandit State' of Czechoslovakia, which was poisoning the whole atmosphere.<sup>2</sup> In the words of the *Daily Telegraph* it was 'imperative that the technique of menace should be abandoned'. And yet, while the *Berliner Tageblatt* was calling the new Širovský Cabinet 'deputies of Stalin' and Dr. Goebbels was assuring the world that Germany might have to march in to save Czechoslovakia from Bolshevism, the 'Palladium of Bohemia', which in past centuries was venerated as

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 24 September.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that on 19 September Herren Sandner and Sebekowsky, two of Herr Henlein's chief lieutenants, and men who barely ten days before had been negotiating with Hodža, Krofta, and Beneš on the basis of territorial integrity and loyalty to the Constitution, now broadcast from Dresden the foulest abuse against Czechoslovakia 'All that comes from Prague from the mouth of Hodža or Beneš is lies and deception' 'Herr Beneš, you have lied and argued your State to its death' And much more about the war agitation of 'Bolshevist and Jewish capitalist secret societies', and Czech brutality unequalled since the 'Hussite hordes of the Middle Ages'. And these are the men who had spent August and half September fooling the Runciman Mission!

capable of saving from pestilence or invasion, was being publicly escorted by the Cardinal and high dignitaries of the Roman Church to the capital city among kneeling or respectful crowds. The contrast was too much even for *The Times*, which protested against the German wireless's 'almost incredible lack of a sense of decency' and concluded as follows: 'If the German Press has faithfully stated German policy, then here is an issue on which every British citizen without exception knows where he stands.'<sup>1</sup> It is quite true that the German public was already beginning to show the symptoms that sometimes follow a terrific overdose; but that cannot excuse the marked indifference of the Prime Minister to the interests of the small country whose future he affected to be safeguarding.

On receiving the memorandum and plan, the Czech Government expressed 'amazement at its contents'. In view of what happened afterwards, the answer conveyed by M. Jan Masaryk to the Foreign Office deserves quoting. 'It is a *de facto* ultimatum, of the sort usually presented to a vanquished nation, and not a proposition to a sovereign State which has shown the greatest possible readiness to make sacrifices for the appeasement of Europe. . . . The proposals go far beyond the so-called Anglo-French Plan. They deprive us of every safeguard for our national existence. We are to yield up large proportions of our carefully prepared defences, and admit German armies deep into our country before we have been able to organize it on a new basis or make any preparations for its defence. Our national and economic independence would automatically disappear with the acceptance of Herr Hitler's plan. The whole process of moving

<sup>1</sup> Leader of 24 September.

the population is to be reduced to panic flight on the part of those who will not accept the German Nazi régime. They have to leave their homes without even the right to take their personal belongings, or even, in the case of peasants, their cow.'<sup>1</sup> The Prague Government therefore rejected the Godesberg conditions as 'absolutely and unconditionally unacceptable', adding that they would 'feel bound to make their utmost resistance', and that 'the nation of St. Wenceslas, John Hus, and Thomas Masaryk will not be a nation of slaves'.

On the Prime Minister's return to London, according to Mr. Duff Cooper's uncontradicted statement in the House, 'We had a long and anxious discussion in the Cabinet with regard to the acceptance or rejection of the Godesberg terms. It was decided to reject them, and that information was conveyed to the German Government.'<sup>2</sup> On the same day the French Cabinet, according to the Paris Correspondent of *The Times*, was unanimous in holding that the Godesberg terms 'must be resisted at any cost', and the first partial French mobilization was carried out with complete calm and even greater efficiency than had been anticipated.

The renewed conversations between British and French Ministers in London on 26 September led to a noticeable stiffening of opinion: M. Daladier, influenced doubtless by General Gamelin, who accompanied him, took the view that the Czech line of fortifications could not be included in the surrendered territory. The *Daily Telegraph*, now rapidly ousting *The Times* from its former primacy, published the text of the Führer's Memorandum and dismissed it as

<sup>1</sup> M. Masaryk to Lord Halifax—White Paper, No. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, 3 October.

altogether extravagant, and 'a radical stiffening of Berchtesgaden'. 'What is required of the Czechs is to accept an abject and humiliating capitulation.' The *Manchester Guardian*, while reminding its readers that we had no *direct obligations* to Czechoslovakia, pointedly asked what would be the effects upon Britain, if Europe were to be ruled by the methods now applied. From Left to Right the Press was rapidly coming into line; of Jingoism or 'war-mongering' there was not a trace, but pessimism grew as Hitler's intransigence became more manifest and his big Berlin speech loomed nearer.

### *On the Razor's Edge*

Those who deny to Mr. Chamberlain the knowledge and versatility necessary for dealing with the volcanic but infinitely astute Führer, hold the view that one of the most fatal of his many tactical blunders was to dispatch Sir Horace Wilson to Berlin with a further 'personal message' for the Führer. In the letter, indeed, he warned against any attempt at 'immediate occupation' of the zones already assigned to the Reich, as likely to be 'condemned as an unnecessary display of force', and then quoted the essence of M. Masaryk's Note upon the Godesberg proposals; and in the belief that 'a settlement by negotiation remains possible', he asked the Führer to consent to immediate discussions between Germany and Czechoslovakia as to the manner in which the territory was to be handed over—in which case Britain would be ready to take part.<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, the Führer remained adamant in his conversation with Sir Horace Wilson, and sent back an uncompromising answer, refusing to delay the occupation in view of 'the present unbearable

<sup>1</sup> White Paper, No. 9—Prime Minister to the Chancellor.

circumstances in the Sudeten German territories'. The extent to which he was reckoning upon ignorance in the Prime Minister and his entourage is shown by his categorical denial that the new frontiers would in any way 'cripple Czechoslovakia in her national existence or in her political and economic independence'. 'It is, on the contrary, a well-known fact that Czechoslovakia after cession would constitute a healthier and more unified economic organism than before.'<sup>1</sup> Those who were at the moment naïve and ignorant enough to swallow this must to-day, unless they are deaf to all argument, be appalled at the rapid falsification of Herr Hitler's claim and the completeness with which within a week or two of the so-called 'settlement' Czechoslovakia was to become a vassal of Berlin.

Certain points of detail relating to this stage still remain to be cleared up. It is known that the Führer informed Sir H. Wilson and Sir N. Henderson in the afternoon of the 26th, that he would not depart from the time-limit fixed by the Godesberg ultimatum, namely, Saturday, 1 October; and Count Ciano has publicly stated<sup>2</sup> that the Italian Ambassador in Berlin reported at 7.30 p.m. on the same day to Rome, that Hitler had decided not to wait till the Saturday, but to march at 2 p.m. on Wednesday. It is not clear whether the Führer said this to his British visitors, or only to Signor Attolico.

Sir Horace arrived in Berlin three hours before the Führer's fateful speech at the Sport Palace in which, with a ferocity of phrase and accent seldom equalled in his public utterances,<sup>3</sup> he fulminated for an hour

<sup>1</sup> White Paper, No. 10, Chancellor to Prime Minister, 17 September.

<sup>2</sup> In his speech of 30 November before the Italian Chamber.

<sup>3</sup> One of a company of distinguished officials and diplomats who listened to him from a neutral country informed me that their general impression was that of 'the snarl of a wild beast' I know of a mixed company of Germans

against President Beneš. He recalled that in his Reichstag speech on 22 February he had stated 'a fundamental demand of an irrevocable nature'—he meant the Anschluss of Austria; and all had understood save one statesman—he meant Herr von Schuschnigg. 'He has been removed, and my promise of that time is redeemed. And now a similar problem confronts the German nation. Its real name was not so much Czechoslovakia as Herr Beneš'—a name that stood for what 'filled millions either with despair or fanatical determination'. Czechoslovakia 'had begun with one original lie', and 'the name of its father was Beneš'. It is impossible to follow his diatribe to its culmination in the words, 'There is Herr Beneš and here am I—and we are two different people. . . . Now he has war or peace in his hands. He will either give the Germans their freedom at last, or we shall go and fetch that freedom. . . . We are determined; Herr Beneš can now choose.' Next morning Mr. Chamberlain issued a statement which showed a complete failure to grasp the true inwardness of the speech. 'I have read the speech and appreciate the references to my efforts to save peace. . . . It is evident that the Chancellor has no faith that the promises will be carried out.' But they had been made, not to Germany direct, but to Britain and France: and '*we regard ourselves as morally responsible* for seeing that they are carried out fairly and

in a foreign capital who also listened to him, and on whom the impression was so overpowering that several of the women burst into convulsive weeping. It is much to be desired that as many people as possible in this country should listen in to the future speeches of the Fuhrer, even if they do not understand a word of German it is impossible to devise any more effective means of bringing home to the plain man *what he is up against*.

'The surge of voices, as in a menagerie where all the animals have gone mad, but by some trick can still be made to bay and howl in unison, will not soon be forgotten by any one who listened through to the end.' This is an American comment—Mr. Fish Armstrong in *Foreign Affairs*, op. cit., p. 250.

fully', and will undertake to see it done, 'provided that Germany will agree to a settlement of terms and conditions of transfer *by discussion and not by force*'. Once more, then, we have this implied slight on the Czech word, this careful avoidance of any friendly recognition of the plight into which we were forcing their country, and coupled with this a pathetic failure to distinguish between 'discussion' and 'force'.

The only possible interpretation of such a speech was that its author was approaching a pitch of homicidal frenzy, that in his arrogance he was convinced that he could force his uttermost will, not only upon the Czechs, but upon the British Premier, and that he reckoned that a vigorous slamming of the door would lead, not to conflict but to a climb-down by the other side. There are grounds for believing that for weeks past persons in England to whose opinion he and Herr von Ribbentrop, rightly or wrongly, attached great importance, had been assuring the Nazi chiefs that they only needed to stand firm, since neither Britain nor even France meant business, and that the reactions of public opinion would prove far less decisive than the telephonic communications of High Finance between London and Paris.

During the next twenty-four hours, however, there were many signs of stiffening on the one side and of dangerous miscalculation on the other. Late on the evening of Hitler's speech the British Government issued the following *communiqué* to the Press: 'If, in spite of the efforts made by the British Prime Minister, a German attack is made upon Czechoslovakia, the immediate result must be that France will be bound to come to her assistance, and Great Britain *and Russia* will certainly stand by France.' This, the first official mention of Russia, naturally caused no small



sensation, but is said to have been less welcome to 10 Downing Street than to the Foreign Office across the road. Incredible as it may seem, attempts were made in the French Right Press to throw doubt on the authenticity of this official statement (for instance, in *Le Jour*, *La Liberté* and *La République*. *Le Matin* actually called it 'a clever lie', and M. Bonnet himself told several deputies that he had no confirmation of it, leaving on them the impression that he was by no means edified at receiving a pledge for which M. Delcassé would have given his eyes on 3 August 1914. Certain it is that there was wholesale sabotage, suppression, and misrepresentation in the French Press. Who was responsible we do not yet know.

A little earlier President Roosevelt had telegraphed to Herr Hitler and President Beneš, reminding them (in the latter case this was obviously merely *pro forma*) that they were bound by the Kellogg Pact and by an Arbitration Treaty, and urging that there should be 'no resort to force'. It is not certain whether the *communiqué* was already known to the Führer when he said good-bye to Sir Horace Wilson; in any case he adhered to the Godesberg Memorandum and announced that unless it had been accepted by 2 p.m. on Thursday 29 September—i.e. in two days' time—the German mobilization would at once begin. On the same day he sent an altogether uncompromising reply to President Roosevelt, laying the entire blame for war, if it should come, upon the Government of Prague and its 'revolting régime of force and bloody terror'.

At 8 p.m. on the Tuesday the Prime Minister, after having had some hours to reflect upon this renewed ultimatum, broadcast to the nation. There is nothing to show whether he had digested one of the most significant passages of the Sport Palace speech, in

which the Führer insisted upon Germany's 'will to peace' with Britain, and added, 'Let us all hope that those who are of the same will will gain the upper hand in the British people.' The British Press was curiously unanimous in evading any interpretation of this phrase; but, coming as it did, at a moment when Mr. Chamberlain seemed to be developing an unwonted firmness towards German demands, it can surely only mean that the Führer desired to see a more yielding or subservient occupant of the Premiership. The only question open is what alternative he had in mind.

Starting from his horror of war, so 'horrible, fantastic, incredible', and his earnest efforts to avert it, he pointed out that after Berchtesgaden he had secured the assent of the Czechs to proposals 'which gave the substance of what Herr Hitler wanted', and that he was therefore 'taken completely by surprise' when at Godesberg the Führer insisted on an immediate occupation 'without previous arrangements for safeguarding the people within the territories who were not Germans or did not want to join the German Reich. I am afraid I must say that I find this attitude unreasonable.' None the less he at once went on to offer to Hitler a British guarantee of Czech fulfilment, and even expressed his readiness to pay a third visit to Germany, though for the moment he saw 'nothing further which he could usefully do in the way of mediation'. After alluding to the need of precautionary measures, he said that 'however much we may sympathize with a small nation confronted by a big and powerful neighbour, we cannot in all circumstances undertake to involve the whole British Empire in war simply on her account. If we have to fight it must be on larger issues than that.' Only if one nation 'had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force',

would he feel justified in going to war; and he left his listeners to infer that such an accusation would not fit the case of Germany.

There are several points in this broadcast which deserve close attention. His reference to 'a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing' reflects very clearly his own attitude to Czechoslovakia, as also does the passage in which he treated it as perfectly natural that the Germans should not trust the word of the Czechs and that Britain might have to hold them to it. Closely bound up with this is the naïve admission that after Berchtesgaden he had forced upon the Czechs proposals which gave Hitler 'the substance of what he wanted', and his even more naïve announcement that the Führer had promised him that 'after this Sudeten German question is settled, that is the end of Germany's territorial claims in Europe'. The Premier's optimism was speedily checked in the official German Press, which interpreted the Führer as meaning that no further claim would be put forward *in addition to those already advanced*, thus leaving the way open to conquest in the Ukraine and interference in half the countries of Eastern Europe.

Just before midnight the mobilization of the British Fleet was announced; two hours later—at 2 a.m. on Wednesday morning—the German radio broadcast an official denial that Germany intended to mobilize on the Thursday afternoon. Moreover, a statement of the official German news agency was given to the British Press at 11.45 on Wednesday, again denying 'reports of an intended mobilization'. The Berlin Correspondent of *The Times* reported a general feeling of 'intense depression and nervousness' and considerable apathy towards the whole Sudeten question.

Meanwhile President Roosevelt addressed a second appeal to Herr Hitler (but this time not to President Beneš, whose answer to the original message had been entirely satisfactory); in polite, but quite unmistakable, language, he warned all and sundry that the use of force might produce a war 'as unnecessary as it is unjustifiable', and suggested the holding of a conference of all the nations directly concerned 'in some neutral spot'. It was already obvious that open aggression would have immediate reactions in the United States,<sup>1</sup> and this doubtless explains why the message was not allowed to be published in the German Press. The evacuation of Paris had already begun, and between 400,000 and 500,000 people were estimated to have left voluntarily. Amid the chaos of unpreparedness in Britain the plans for the evacuation of London school-children and for the maintenance of milk-supplies worked with remarkable speed and efficiency. There were also signs that the Dominions, whose Governments had been kept fully informed and naturally had no desire for a fresh European conflict, were none the less alive to the vital issues at stake; while loyal messages began to pour in from the Indian Princes and the leaders of the Indian Congress took an open line against German aggression.

In Italy there was a curious lethargy in official circles. *The Times'* Correspondent in Rome reported that 'the only evidence of preparation for war' was the steps taken by an anti-aircraft organization to ascertain facts about householders—thereby revealing the backwardness of precautionary measures. It became known that the King was extremely averse to signing a decree

<sup>1</sup> This time the Governments of Argentina and Chili associated themselves with the United States, thus foreshadowing a single alignment of the whole American Continent in the event of war.

of mobilization, and that the Crown Prince shared his views; and there were unmistakable symptoms of unrest in the cities of Lombardy. It was also not without significance that General Franco issued a cautiously worded pronouncement in favour of neutrality and that a large number of Italian airmen were hurriedly recalled from Spain.

In one word, Germany stood alone. Italy paid lip-service to the Axis, but seemed unlikely to commit herself until the scales began to tip decisively in one direction. Poland adopted a milder note towards Prague in view of the Russian troops massing near her eastern frontier, and President Moscicki sent a friendly message to President Beneš in reply to the latter's overture. Hungary in her turn grew more cautious in proportion as it became more obvious that any attack by her upon Slovakia would certainly involve her in war with Roumania, and probably with Jugoslavia also. Moreover, Roumania had throughout the summer pursued a policy of absolute loyalty towards her Czechoslovak ally, and with a view to rendering her effective help had been engaged in improving the all-too-inadequate railway and road communications between the Russian frontier in northern Bessarabia and the Ruthene corridor that formed the most easterly sector of the Czechoslovak Republic. This is susceptible of only one meaning—namely, that she was prepared in the event of a war in which her chief ally would be fighting for very life, to allow the passage of Russian troops across her territory—a step which would undoubtedly strengthen Poland's tendency to remain neutral, or perhaps at a later stage espouse the cause of her own two allies, France and Roumania. In Bulgaria, instead of a tendency to make capital out of Roumania's preoccupations, the dominant note was

one of loud and vociferous sympathy with the Czechs. In Yugoslavia the nation was unanimous in the same sense, and volunteers crowded to the Czech Legation to offer their services.

In Germany there was no sign of the *élan* which her soldiers and her civil population showed in August 1914; and nothing is more significant than the blend of anxiety and cordiality with which the German public greeted Mr. Chamberlain during his first and second visits. The relative position of guns and butter had not changed, and the housewife who saw a war beginning in economic conditions not very dissimilar to those in which the last war had ended, could not view the future without grave alarm. The wholesale transfers of workmen for purposes not greatly differing from forced labour had already earlier in the summer caused no little disquiet. There are good grounds for believing that on the night of the 27th the Fuhrer called into consultation the Chief of Staff and other leading generals and a number of the most prominent *Gauleiter* (or provincial prefects) and that their advice, determined in large measure by the news of the British naval mobilization, was strongly against the hazard of war.<sup>1</sup>

Of the British Press it may be said that there was virtual unanimity in desiring to avert war, but also in regarding the Godesberg terms as not merely 'unacceptable' (the Premier's own word), but entirely unwarranted in face of Czech moderation. Even the *Observer*, which had gone farther in its attacks upon Czechoslovakia than any other reputable newspaper, confessed that after the Sport Palace speech 'a sense of despair and of the inevitability of war gripped the whole world', and while welcoming 'the separation of

<sup>1</sup> Pertinax, in *L'Europe Nouvelle*.

the two races of Bohemia', attempted no defence of the Godesberg 'ultimatum'.

### *Strategic Considerations*

In this strangely fluid situation military considerations obviously played the dominant part; but it is impossible to give more than very general indications, firstly, because the writer can lay no claim to expert military knowledge, and, secondly, because many facts still cannot be revealed, even for purposes of just criticism and condemnation. But the essence of the situation was clear enough. The Czechs were faced, as in the later Middle Ages, with the alternative of resisting aggression or losing their new-found liberties in all save name and becoming dependent upon a great neighbour. To the last man, woman, and child they were ready to fight for liberty, and it ill became those Westerners who had forgotten the efforts of their ancestors in that cause, to suggest that the odds were hopeless; only twenty years ago Belgium, Serbia and Roumania gave the answer to that argument, and are to-day stronger and more alive than ever before.

The loyalty of France to the alliance was the keystone of the arch, alike from a military and a political point of view; Beneš's whole calculations rested on it, and knowing the absolute loyalty of the French soldiers, he also trusted the solemn and reiterated assurances of French statesmen. At the height of the crisis the Chief of Staff, General Gamelin, drew up a confidential report for the Government, recapitulating all the *pros* and *cons* (the *cons* first) of the situation, but summing up with the confident assurance that despite certain weaknesses the French Army would prove equal to the test of war. It is widely believed in Paris that the politicians who transmitted this report to

London drastically cut down the optimistic sections while leaving the more pessimistic untouched, and this of course produced a highly disturbing effect upon their British colleagues. It may be that this story, like so many others, is false and was deliberately put about to cause confusion; but it is so persistent and believed in such serious quarters that there is real need for full investigation and official explanation (not the usual platitudes, but clear proof or refutation). One thing may positively be affirmed—that there was no trace of ‘defeatism’ in the French High Command, and that almost everywhere (the word ‘almost’ must not be omitted) the conscripts responded calmly and loyally to the summons to the colours.

Czechoslovakia had the best equipped and best disciplined small army in the world; in the best sense of the word it was a citizen army, with a united people behind it. This meant 30 to 40 divisions against about 140 German divisions; but of the latter only 60 would be available if France kept her word, for Germany would have to keep at least half her troops on the Western frontier and a considerable army of observation to watch the Poles. In such circumstances it was calculated that the Czechs could hold out for four months, within their mountain fortresses, and that long before that time Russian and Roumanian help would have materialized. Instant help would indeed have come by air from Russia, but communications across the north of Bessarabia and Bukovina and along the narrow Ruthenian corridor were so imperfect that rapid movements of troops and munitions could not be expected. If once Russia fulfilled her contract, however (and we shall see that she was always ready to do so), Poland’s neutrality would almost automatically follow, and Hungary could not risk military action in



Slovakia such as would bring Roumania and Jugoslavia upon her from the south. If, on the other hand, France repudiated, Russia was in no way bound, and if she held aloof, it would hardly be practicable for Roumania to move, and the much less reliable Yugoslav Government (despite the movement of popular feeling) would welcome an excuse for doing nothing, and, worst of all, Poland would be tempted to seize Teschen for herself and the mining district of Bohumin to forestall the Germans, and might even, in pursuance of her habitual anti-Slav perfidy, ally herself with Hungary. In that case the Czechoslovak General Staff held that the application of a Magyar-Polish pincer at the two most vulnerable points of the whole Czechoslovak State (the industrial district of Moravska Ostrava on the north and the junction of the Morava with the Danube on the south) would either paralyse Czech resistance to the main German attacks or reduce by half or even two-thirds the period for which they might hope to hold out. It will thus be seen that Russia depended upon France and, in varying degrees, Roumania, Jugoslavia, Hungary, and Poland on Russia, while Italy might be expected to hold back and throw her weight upon the winning side.

One other alternative remained—namely, for Czechoslovakia to appeal to Russia, quite irrespective of her Pacts with Paris and Prague, and ask her military help on what would in effect be a basis curiously compounded of Genevan and Pan-Slavist doctrine—help from the Great Slav Brother to the most Slavophil of all Slav nations in its dire distress, and vindication of the Covenant, not by its framers, but by its latest recruit among the Great Powers. From the military angle such action would have been unexceptionable, but for the grave doubts as to the value of the Russian

Army machine and of the industries on which it would depend in war-time, which the successive purges in the higher ranks had aroused throughout Europe. This was much less of a deterrent to Prague than to any other capital, because the Czechs had unique sources of accurate information as to Russia and many direct military and industrial contacts, on the basis of which their Staff drew conclusions very definitely less unfavourable than those which an insidious Nazi propaganda made to circulate in Fleet Street, and in the French Press of the Right. But there were other still more cogent political objections. It is easy to see what a boon such an alliance would have conferred upon Dr. Goebbels, whose Press and radio organs had for months past been denouncing the Czech 'Hussite Bolsheviks'. Western opinion would easily have taken alarm, and there might have arisen a clear 'ideological' decision between an Eastern and a Western European camp, with Czechoslovakia irrevocably tied up with the Bolshevik system in the event of victory, or in the event of defeat wiped out as effectively as the wilder Hussite sectaries after 1431. It may well be that those who denounced Dr. Beneš most loudly or were most chary of their recognition, realized only too well that this was something which neither he nor any one trained in the school of Masaryk could contemplate. Conscious Slavophil though he was, Beneš was also by all his traditions and philosophic faith a man of the West, identified with the West, and with all the standards embodied in the Covenant of the League for which he fought to the last, while Western statesmen paid lip-service to it and betrayed it. Beneš, Hodža, Krofta, the many able officials who loyally followed them, 'they proved to be' (in Mr. Armstrong's words), 'too much the civilized and intellectualized

product of the last War, too thoroughly "men of Geneva", to be able deliberately and of their own accord to pick up a brutal bully's gage'.<sup>1</sup>

### *Russia and the Crisis*

There is another aspect from which Russia's attitude in the crisis falls to be considered. It is highly significant that while the openly avowed major aim of German policy was the isolation of Russia and her exclusion from the conduct of European affairs, the Western Powers, instead of realizing the fatal effects which this was bound to have upon the general balance of forces, should have lent themselves, at least negatively, to its accomplishment by keeping Russia more than ever at arm's length.

It is surely passing strange that during this period of repeated private representations to Berlin, the British Government in particular should have studiously avoided any consultation of that other Power, which, like France and unlike Britain, had definite obligations towards Prague, and on whose attitude in the event of war so much would depend—namely, Soviet Russia. This was all the more marked because Russia was the first of the Powers to react publicly to the new situation created for Czechoslovakia by the Austrian Anschluss and its bearings on general peace. Already on 17 March M. Litvinov gave Press interviews in which he voiced Russian readiness to share in collective action, either through the League or outside it. 'It may be too late to-morrow,' he said, 'but to-day the time has not yet gone by, if all States, and the Great Powers in particular, take a firm and unambiguous stand in regard to the problem of the collective salvation of peace.' This statement was at once

<sup>1</sup> *Foreign Affairs*, p 238.

communicated to the British, French, Czechoslovak, and Austrian Governments as the official view of Russia; but on the 24th the proposal was rejected by London as 'inopportune', and Paris took the same line.

Both during the visit of the French Premier to London at the end of April, and again in connexion with the British and French *démarche* at the crisis of 21 May, the two Governments pointedly refrained from any consultation of Moscow. The explicit statements of M. Kalinin on 11 May, and again of the Soviet Ambassador at Washington on 25 August—to the effect that Russia would carry out her undertakings to Czechoslovakia and France 'to the letter', and that 'a firm stand against the aggressors is the fundamental solution of the present international tension'—remained without the slightest response from the West. Still less was there any attempt at joint or parallel action in Prague, and the decision to send the Runciman Mission was not even notified to Russia. Throughout the critical weeks of August and September no attempt was made by the British Government to consult the Soviet Government or to discuss its probable attitude in the event of a German attack upon Czechoslovakia. On 21 September, however, M. Litvinov made a very outspoken statement at the assembly of the League, expressing sympathy for Czechoslovakia—the fifth State to be menaced with aggression in defiance of the League—and urging collective action before it was too late. After a long and able *exposé* of League principles and the rival attitudes prevalent towards them, he became quite concrete towards the close, announced Russia's intention of joining the French in defence of Czechoslovakia, and the readiness of the Russian Army chiefs to confer immediately with the French and Czech staffs—in addition, of course, to collective action

through the League and general discussion among interested Governments.

It was presumably as a result of this resounding speech (less resounding than it deserved, however, for it was not adequately reported in the Press), that a belated conversation took place at Geneva on 13 September between Lord De La Warr and Mr. Butler on the one hand and MM. Litvinov and Maisky on the other. The details of what passed are of course not known, but it is known that the two British diplomats had had ample occasion for an exchange of views ever since the League met on the 10 September, but had steadily refrained until the belated instructions of the 23rd; and that M. Litvinov reiterated in plain language Russia's readiness to fulfil her obligations, *but also the need for immediate precautionary measures*. This was presumably reported to London, but it led to no corresponding action.

This marked reserve on the part of London assumes added importance in the light of what is known to have passed on 2 September between the French Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow and M. Litvinov, from whom, in the name of his Government, he asked a statement of Russian intentions on the Czech question. To this M. Litvinov replied quite explicitly, that Russia was 'firmly resolved' to fulfil all her obligations if France did likewise, and in order to render this more effective, he suggested immediate Staff talks between Moscow, Paris, and Prague, in order to work out plans for the defence of Czechoslovakia. At the same time he advocated a joint *démarche* of Russia, Britain, and France in favour of the Czechs, and a formal invocation of Article XI of the Covenant. Nine days elapsed without any response whatsoever. On 11 September M. Bonnet, during a brief visit to Geneva, saw M. Litvinov, who

reaffirmed to him the assurances already given to the Chargé at Moscow. What M. Bonnet replied verbally is not known, but on paper the Russian overture remained unanswered, and there is a strong presumption that it was concealed by Paris from London, where it would presumably have received attention. Only on this assumption is it possible to understand the extraordinary statement of Lord Winterton at Shoreham on 10 October, to the effect that Russia 'only made very vague promises owing to her military weakness'. When this was raised in the House of Commons by Mr. Arthur Henderson, the Prime Minister professed himself at a loss to see the purpose of raising this question, but at least he did not uphold Lord Winterton's untenable thesis, and M. Maisky's formal protest to the Foreign Office was followed by 'a friendly conversation' and the 'closing' of the incident. This attempt at face-saving deceived no one.

It will thus be seen that the attitude of Russia was clear and consistent throughout the crisis, but that of the two Western Powers inexplicable on any other thesis than that from the first they had no intention of helping Czechoslovakia. Otherwise it would have been sheer insanity to neglect the proper steps towards military co-operation in case of need.

### *Parliament and Accomplished Facts*

It was in such critical circumstances as these, when war seemed imminent, that Parliament was at last allowed to meet, only to find itself manoeuvred into the position of accepting a series of accomplished facts.

It is unnecessary to recapitulate in full the Prime Minister's speech of 28 September, which was devoted to a bald but fairly detailed narrative of events from the Runciman Mission onwards; its most essential

points have already been quoted in other contexts. It is right to allude to the special emphasis laid upon the difficulty of establishing personal contacts with totalitarian leaders, as one of the main motives which inspired his courageous, but perilous, decision to fly to Berchtesgaden. At times he was frank to the point of bluntness, revealing the Fuhrer's readiness to risk a world war rather than wait, and his own impression that Hitler 'was contemplating an immediate invasion of Czechoslovakia'. His account of the Anglo-French negotiations was scanty in the extreme, but he defined the aim of the two Governments in a revealing phrase—'to find a solution which would not bring about a European war, and therefore a solution which would not automatically compel France *to take action in accordance with her obligations*'—another way of saying that the Czechs were to be forced at the pistol's mouth to surrender all the positions which the alliance existed to defend, and which the Czechs would never have taken up if they had not relied upon its absolute sanctity. The spectacle of two Great Powers secretly debating the means of rendering the alliance inoperative is an ugly one, and not less ugly for a barrage of fine phrases about the 'pacification of Europe'.

The Prime Minister also stressed the Government's readiness to join in a general international guarantee of the new boundaries of Czechoslovakia against unprovoked aggression, 'in place of the existing treaties with France and Russia, which involve reciprocal obligations of a military character'. In 'urging this solution' upon Prague without consultation of any kind, he and his colleagues simply took it for granted that the Czechs would find it preferable to deal with the problem by the method of direct transfer rather than by means of a plebiscite, which 'would involve

serious difficulties as regards other nationalities in Czechoslovakia'. The Government, he insisted, was thereby 'accepting a completely new commitment'; but as his adroit handling of the situation enabled him to escape from the House without a word of criticism, he did not find it necessary to explain what value such a guarantee could offer in a radically transformed Europe. Within a few short weeks, but when it was already too late to make good what had been lost, the march of events was to demonstrate to the whole world that the guarantee was either worthless or impracticable or had never been meant seriously. To this it will be necessary to return in connexion with the Munich Agreement.

Mr. Chamberlain then described his later conversations with Herr Hitler, and his hearers could not fail to conclude that he had accepted unchallenged the Führer's wild talk about Czech 'oppression and terrorism', about dilatory tactics and opportunities for further 'evasion', though he must by now have been fully aware that the boot was on the other leg, and that the Sudeten regions had long been the object of a sustained terrorism from the Reich. It may well be, however, that he realized argument to be almost useless and was resolved to avoid anything that might even be twisted to sound like provocation. He openly admitted that the Führer's proposals at their first conversation at Godesberg came upon him as 'a profound shock', and that he found it expedient to exchange written communications, and did not therefore recross the Rhine until late in the evening. At the final interview with the Führer, however—in the presence of Herr von Ribbentrop, Sir Nevile Henderson, and Sir Horace Wilson—finding 'for the first time a time-limit in the memorandum', he dwelt 'with all the emphasis at my command' on the risks of 'insisting on such terms',



described the document as an ultimatum rather than a memorandum', and 'bitterly reproached the Chancellor for his failure to respond in any way'. Despite such plain speech the conversation was more friendly in character than its predecessors,<sup>1</sup> and the Prime Minister ended by accepting the Fuhrer's triple assurance that 'this was the last of his territorial ambitions in Europe', that he had 'no wish to include in the Reich people of other races than German', and that 'he wanted to be friends with England' and would gladly 'resume conversations if only the Sudeten question could be got out of the way'. There remained, Herr Hitler added, 'one awkward question, the Colonies', but that was not a matter for war or mobilization.

Mr. Chamberlain's narrative was distinctly balder when it came to deal with events after his own return to London. Nothing was said as to the second exchange of views with the French Ministers on the 26th, save the highly significant fact that they had informed him '*that if Czechoslovakia were attacked France would fulfil her treaty obligations*', and that he had replied that if that should lead to war 'we should feel obliged to support them'. This was followed by the dispatch of Sir Horace Wilson to Berlin that same day; but the Premier tersely admitted that Herr Hitler had merely 'listened to him', but declined to 'depart from the procedure of the memorandum', in other words, to postpone by one hour the date of the impending ultimatum. Next day, however, acting on instructions from Downing Street, Sir Horace informed the Fuhrer of 'the upshot' of the Anglo-French conversations—namely, that if Germany attacked, France would fulfil

<sup>1</sup> 'An interesting sidelight on the effectiveness of righteous indignation and plain speaking,' comments Mr Armstrong (*Foreign Affairs*, op cit., p 243)

her obligations and Britain would support her. It is highly significant that this perhaps unexpected sign of firmness produced a written answer from Herr Hitler, in which the Premier was able to detect 'certain additional assurances' and a 'further narrowing down of the differences'. He therefore sent what he called 'the last last' message to Hitler, assuring him that 'you can get all essentials without war and without delay', and that he was ready to go to Berlin to discuss 'arrangements for transfer with you and representatives of the Czech Government, together with representatives of France and Italy, if you desire'. 'I feel convinced that we could reach agreement in a week. However much you distrust the Prague Government's intentions, you cannot doubt the power of the British and French Governments to see that the promises are carried out fairly and fully and forthwith.'<sup>1</sup> He had at the same time sent a personal message to the Duce, inviting his co-operation; and to this there had come the prompt answer that Mussolini had urged his fellow Dictator to postpone action, and had actually obtained his consent to a delay of twenty-four hours in mobilization.

Thus far the Prime Minister had restricted himself almost entirely to narrative, with a minimum of comment; his tone had been so matter-of-fact, so measured that some of his listeners had already reached the conclusion that he was deliberately drawing it out and waiting in some unexplained way for something to happen. And sure enough at this stage he proceeded to make use of a paper which had just been handed to Sir John Simon at his side on the Front Bench, and

<sup>1</sup> This deserves to be recalled in the light of subsequent events. What efforts have the British or French Governments made to see that the agreed terms of Munich should be carried out by Germany? None whatever

which enabled him to spring a sensation on the House. This was the announcement that Herr Hitler had invited him to Munich next day, together with Signor Mussolini and M. Daladier. 'Signor Mussolini has accepted, and I have no doubt M. Daladier will also accept. I need not say what my answer will be.' The scene that followed was certainly one of the most memorable of modern times, though whether it enhanced the honour of the House or the nation may well be questioned. On all sides there were cheers and waving order papers, some members even wept with emotion; to the present writer, who witnessed the scene from a seat under the gallery, the phrase applied to it by Mr. Harold Nicolson—'mass hysteria'—seems utterly to the point. I at least hope never again to live through such five minutes of shame for my country or disillusionment at the miscarriage of the parliamentary system!

The Prime Minister's tactics were triumphant; he was acclaimed for his successive surrenders, without any one stopping to criticize his statements or to probe his motives, and he 'got away' with the Anglo-French Plan, not as an infamous betrayal dictated to a helpless nation, but as a benign and justifiable project for the prevention of universal war. Moreover, the leaders of the Opposition, Mr. Attlee and Mr. Greenwood, allowed themselves to be rushed into the fatal step of seconding the motion for the adjournment, thereby fatally abdicating their constitutional right to sound a warning note before irrevocable decisions were taken. Two men only had the courage to hold back for one instant the floodgates of sentimental and unreasoning relief. Sir Archibald Sinclair, recalling the Prime Minister's one-sided determination to 'see that the Czechs carry out the obligations that they have

accepted' (he might have added, 'under duress vile'), hoped that 'he will go with an equal determination to see that the new Czech State in its new frontiers will have a chance of economic survival and complete freedom and independence'. And the debate ended with a blunt protest from the solitary Communist member, Mr. Gallacher: 'The policy of the National Government has led to this crisis. . . . I would not be a party to what has been going on here. There are as many Fascists opposite as there are in Germany, and I protest against the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.' Even amid the emotion of the moment there were some who wondered uneasily whether this was not indeed the writing on the wall for a régime pronounced decadent by the very men to whom it was preparing to capitulate.

### *The Victory of Munich*

For the third time Mr. Chamberlain flew to Germany, again taking with him, not the Foreign Secretary or Under Secretary, but Sir Horace Wilson, and this time certain able, if subordinate, officials of the Foreign Office. The basis upon which the Conference met was neither that of the Great Powers, nor of the Powers directly concerned as neighbours of the two disputants, but simply and solely that of the two Central and two Western Powers, to the exclusion of all others, great and small. Russia, whose name had been for the first and last time coupled with the Western Powers in the midnight *communiqué* of 26 September, was now once more ignored; and Poland and the Little Entente, and therefore of course all other lesser Powers, were also passed over, and nothing more was heard of the inclusion of Czechoslovakia itself. For it was reserved for the operating-table, and the surgeon's knife was

pressed into the hands of the rival litigant by those who preferred vicarious to personal sacrifice.

The two Dictators had been quick to see their chance; Mr. Chamberlain had already forced the Czechs to submit, and now made no concealment of his intention to act without them. M. Daladier was in a minority of one and weakly threw his ally to the wolves. The Duce in his speeches at Trieste and other towns had been abusing President Beneš and 'the rotten eggs of Prague' in terms only less violent than those employed by the Press jackals of the Führer, and he now threw his entire weight on to the German side. Thus the Munich Agreement could be pushed through with the same indecent haste and amateur methods as the Anglo-French Pact of ten days earlier.

The terms may be summed up quite succinctly. The evacuation of Sudeten territory was to be carried out in four stages, the first beginning as early as 1 October, the fourth being completed on 7 October, according to lines indicated on the attached map; and an international Commission, composed of representatives of the four Powers and of Czechoslovakia, was to lay down 'the conditions governing evacuation and to define forthwith the remaining territory of preponderantly German character', in time for this also to be occupied as soon as 10 October.

The Czech Government was to be held responsible for any damage done to 'existing installations', an obscure and elastic phrase, capable of including both fortifications and factory plant.

After these zones had been occupied, the Commission was to determine what other territory should be submitted to a plebiscite, at a date not later than the end of November, and to arrange for its occupation 'by international bodies' until the completion of the voting.

The Commission was also to carry out the final delimitation of frontiers, but would be entitled to recommend to the four Powers 'in certain exceptional cases minor modifications in the strictly ethnographical determination of the zones which are to be transferred without plebiscite'.

A right of option into, and out of, the transferred territories could be exercised during a period of six months, the details of 'the transfer of population and questions of principle arising therefrom' being left to a German-Czech commission.

The Czech Government was, within a period of four weeks, to release from military or police service any Sudeten Germans who might desire it, and also to hand over to the Reich any Germans imprisoned for political offences, without any reciprocal undertaking on behalf of Czechs detained in the Reich.

### *The Final Ultimatum to the Czechs*

Before considering the effects of this Agreement, it is necessary to be clear as to the treatment meted out to the Czechs at Munich. Mr. Chamberlain's original proposal had been for German-Czech negotiations, with Britain and, if Germany desired, France and Italy, as participants, but of this nothing more was heard, and the Czechs were not even invited to be present at the decisions regarding their future fate, or rather, they could not be offered a chair at the conference table, because they were to be strapped down for vivisection on the table itself. The Prague Government, in desperation, sent MM. Mastný and Masařík to represent it, but when they arrived at the Munich aerodrome at 4.30 p.m., the conference was already sitting without any Czech being present. They were met by members of the Gestapo (secret police), escorted

in a police car to their hotel, and were not able to communicate with any one till after 7 o'clock. At that hour they saw Mr. Gwatkin, who was 'upset and very silent', as well he might be, and from his very cautious remarks they gathered that a plan 'far more disastrous than the Anglo-French proposals' had already been adopted 'in its main lines'. In response to their insistence on the internal repercussions of such a settlement in Czechoslovakia, Mr. Gwatkin replied that they did not seem to realize 'the difficult situation of the Western Powers and the awkwardness of negotiating with Hitler'.

Meanwhile the terms proposed by the Big Four were transmitted to Prague direct, once more in the form of an ultimatum, but this time *with a time-limit of only two hours*. In their despairing answer the Czech Cabinet accepted unreservedly the time limit of 31 October for a final settlement, supervision of the transfer by the International Commission and by the British Legion, and revision of their system of treaties, but declared themselves unable to accept a plebiscite in purely Czech areas. 'In the interests of their own defences and that of the Czech and Democratic German minority and also of the Jews in the territory, they cannot evacuate or demobilize or abandon fortifications before the delimitation of the frontiers has been fixed, the exchange of populations guaranteed, and a new system of international guarantees initiated. But they place the interests of civilization before the distress of their own people and are resolved to make sacrifices which never in history were exacted from an undefeated State.'

This last appeal was treated in the same cavalier fashion as the hapless Czech delegates in Munich, who, after waiting till 10 p.m., were brought by the

reluctant Mr. Gwatkin to Sir Horace Wilson's room and there, at Mr. Chamberlain's desire, shown a map on which the main lines of the new scheme were marked. Sir Horace informed them that he could not add further details or deal with their objections, and he then went back to the Conference, leaving the two Czechs with Mr. Gwatkin. In their full report there occurs the following passage: 'When he again began to speak of the difficulty of negotiations with Hitler, I told him that in reality all depended on the firmness of the Western Powers. Then Mr. Gwatkin replied in solemn tones: "If you did not accept that, you would have to settle your affairs quite alone with Germany. Perhaps the French will tell you more amiably, but believe me, they are of our opinion. . . . They are disinteresting themselves."'

Finally, at 1.30 a.m., they were introduced into the Conference, where Messrs. Chamberlain, Daladier, Wilson, Leger, and Gwatkin remained, the two Dictators having already withdrawn from the scene of their dictated victory. 'The French were visibly embarrassed and seemed to realize their loss of prestige.' But Mr. Chamberlain, 'who was constantly yawning, without the least sign of embarrassment', simply gave the declaration to M. Mastný to read aloud, and then listened impatiently to the various points raised by the Czechs. Neither he nor M. Leger were able to define the meaning of the phrase, 'preponderantly German character', but claimed that it was 'only the application of the plan already accepted' (the Anglo-French Plan of 18 September). Mr. Chamberlain told M. Mastný that the Czech member of the International Commission would have the same right of voting as the others. When asked whether the plebiscite areas would be occupied by international or British troops, the



answer was that this was not yet settled, and that Italian and Belgian troops were being considered. When MM. Daladier and Leger were asked whether the plan laid before the delegates would be submitted to the Prague Government, the former, 'visibly embarrassed, did not reply', while the latter pointed out that the four statesmen had not much time, that they expected no reply from Prague, that they regarded the Plan as accepted and that the Prague Government must send its delegate to the International Commission in Berlin by 5 p.m. on that very day at latest, and by Saturday at latest the officer who was to fix with the Germans the details of evacuation of the First Zone. *'It had been explained to us,'* added M. Masařík, *'in a sufficiently brutal manner, and this by a Frenchman, that it was a matter of condemnation without appeal and without possible modification.'*<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the two Dictators, with the help of the British Premier, had imposed their will, and left him and his craven French ally to present a third ultimatum within ten days to the unhappy Czechs. If ever there was a settlement to which the title of 'Diktat'—that method against which the Germans protested so vigorously at Versailles and after—could be applied, it was the triple and progressive surrender of Berchtesgaden, Godesberg, and Munich. Mr. Chamberlain, however, continues to maintain that this was 'peace by agreement'—if this is so, then words lose all their meaning.

<sup>1</sup> This moving document was printed *in extenso* in *L'Ordre* of 12 November 1938. I heard it read aloud in London by a celebrated French journalist before a private audience of several hundred persons, most of whom shared my sense of humiliation and rage.

### CHAPTER III

#### 'PEACE WITH HONOUR'

"Peace with Honour" is one of the unforgettable phrases of English history. It has passed into the currency of the language, with the same permanence as have "Roll up the map of Europe" and "Every man has his price".—*The Times*, Leader of 11 October 1938.

THE Prime Minister, after conceding at the expense of Czechoslovakia all the essentials which Herr Hitler demanded, and having apparently persuaded himself that such concessions were the best path towards 'appeasement in Europe', had a final talk with the Führer before leaving Munich, and suggested that they should put their names to a joint Anglo-German declaration. This document, which Mr. Chamberlain held up to the crowd as he left his plane at Heston, falls under three heads:

'(1) We are agreed in recognizing that the question of Anglo-German relations is of the first importance for the two countries and for Europe.

'(2) We regard the Agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Convention as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.

'(3) We are resolved that the method of consultation shall be the method adopted to deal with any other questions that may concern our two countries, and we are determined to continue our efforts to remove possible sources of differences and thus to contribute to assure the peace of Europe.'

In the House of Commons on 3 October Mr Chamberlain ascribed great importance to these

admirable generalities, insisting that they were 'more than a pious expression of opinion' and were the proof of 'the sincerity and good will on both sides'; and at the Guildhall Banquet on 10 November he was still so convinced of their value, that he again read them out in full and seemed to suggest that their critics must be 'war-at-any-price men'. In both cases the logical effect of what was really a pacifist appeal to a country profoundly averse to war, was spoilt by an immediate insistence that the Government's 'great programme of rearmament, daily increasing in pace and in volume', could not be relaxed for a moment. On the first occasion he justified this by arguing that 'we have only laid the foundations of peace: the superstructure is not even begun'. On the second he found it necessary to meet a charge of inconsistency between conciliation and appeasement on the one hand and the piling up of armaments on the other, and his denial completely failed to carry conviction.<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister's confidence in the Führer's bare word, and above all in his abandonment of all further territorial designs, seemed hard to reconcile with the announcement that even the enormous sums expended on rearmament since 1937 would have to be augmented still further. The two things are absolutely incompatible, and after the first emotional outbursts of relief at the avoidance of war had passed, this became increasingly obvious to the thinking section of the population. 'Peace in our time'—which the Prime Minister claimed to have brought back from Munich, as Disraeli had brought back 'Peace with Honour' from Berlin in 1878<sup>2</sup>—

<sup>1</sup> The knowledge that Holland and Norway are a standing menace to our position in the North Sea, that Yugoslavia aims at ejecting us from the Mediterranean, and that Liberia threatens our Atlantic sea-routes, was doubtless present in all minds.

<sup>2</sup> In those days, when the cleavage over a question of foreign policy was

carried no conviction with the younger generation, who sarcastically hinted that 'our time' might mean the time of the Prime Minister and his elderly contemporaries, but not the time of those who would inevitably bear the brunt of the next war. To them Munich seemed to be the worst of a whole series of capitulations, and they felt it to be utterly futile to attempt to make good by rearmament the ground lost by retreat.

### *Munich versus Godesberg*

From 3 to 6 October Mr. Chamberlain had to submit to a full-dress parliamentary debate on the Munich settlement, but so break-neck had been the pace imposed by Hitler, that even before the debate the evacuation of German Bohemia had already begun, and even the most stalwart critics were confronted by a long series of accomplished facts which nothing could now undo. This doubtless explains why the opposition inside the Cabinet itself, which a week earlier had flared high among the younger Conservatives, now flickered out ignominiously. Only one Minister pushed disapproval to the point of resignation, but it is highly significant that this should have been one of the Ministers who knew most about the conditions in the fighting services. This certainly gave additional weight to the weighty speech with which Mr. Duff Cooper opened the debate. Speaking as a student of foreign affairs, with ten years of service in the Foreign Office, he argued that 'the great defect in our policy during the recent months and weeks' was that, as in 1914, we

almost as deep as it is to-day, a cynic coined the phrase, that it was 'the peace that passeth all understanding' and 'the honour that is common among thieves'. Yet its most trenchant historical critic—and such perhaps I may without immodesty claim to be, having devoted several years to a monograph entitled *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question* (Macmillan, 1935)—would never dream of comparing it in infamy to the 'Diktat' of Munich.

failed to 'make it plain exactly where we stood and what we would do', while Herr Hitler had been 'assured, reassured, and fortified in the opinion that in no case would Britain fight'. He also protested against the tendency in certain quarters to draw a red herring across the trail by the indignant suggestion that our people could not be expected to fight for Czechoslovakia. 'It was not for Serbia, not even for Belgium, that we fought in 1914. . . . We were fighting then, as we should have been fighting last week, in order that one Great Power should not be allowed, in disregard of treaty obligations, of the law of nations, and the decrees of morality, to dominate by brutal force the continent of Europe.' While approving of the Prime Minister's speech after the Anschluss and of Sir John Simon's speech at Lanark, he considered them to be too guarded, not couched in 'the language which Dictators understand; for together with new methods and a new morality they have introduced also a new vocabulary into Europe'. The fear of irritating Hitler was much exaggerated: 'the communication of a solemn fact would have had a sobering effect' upon him. What the Prime Minister said to him first at Berchtesgaden, then at Godesberg, and then through a message at Berlin, had no deterrent effect. He had successively pledged himself to uphold Locarno, to respect Austrian independence, and not to interfere with Czechoslovakia, and what was left of these pledges now? And if he now assured the Prime Minister that there would be no war over the Colonies, did that mean that he 'would take "No" for an answer' or 'did it mean that he believes he will get away with this, as he has got away with everything else, without fighting, by well-timed bluff, bluster, and blackmail'?

Mr. Cooper's speech deserves special emphasis,

because its most telling points struck a note of ominous doubt at the very outset and remained unanswered throughout the debate. Many other able speeches were delivered on both sides of the House, but it would be quite impossible to summarize them all in a narrative such as the present. But in any case everything else is of secondary importance, compared with the arguments by which the Prime Minister set himself to justify the Munich settlement. The Godesberg Memorandum he described as 'in fact an ultimatum, with a time-limit of six days', and again as 'those unacceptable terms'. But he laid great stress on the difference between the Godesberg Memorandum and the Munich Agreement, and even went so far as to argue that 'on the difference between those two documents will depend judgment as to whether we were successful in what we set out to do, namely, to find an orderly, instead of a violent, method of carrying out an agreed decision'. As he spoke, the full facts of a still fluid situation were still unknown to the public and to himself. But the events of the next few weeks were to bring overwhelming proof that Munich (or 'Munich-Berlin', in other words, the Agreement as modified by the International Commission in Berlin), so far from being an improvement upon Godesberg, was in many respects decidedly worse. This can be demonstrated point by point.

(1) The Prime Minister made great play with the fact that Munich was a reversion to the Anglo-French Plan, that it laid down the principle of 'international supervision' by the Four Powers, and that it provided for German military occupation no longer 'in one operation by 1 October', but 'in five clearly defined stages',<sup>1</sup> between 1 and 10 October. But both in the

<sup>1</sup> In actual fact there were only *four* 'clearly defined stages'. The Fifth Zone was left completely undefined at Munich.

Czech answer to the original Plan and later in the Czech Note criticizing the Godesberg Memorandum, it was strongly urged that so short a time-limit for evacuation would inevitably involve not merely the surrender of the line of fortifications, but the laying bare of their innermost secrets to the German Army. This was, of course, the main reason for Germany's insistence and haste; but so deaf to all reason were the British and French statesmen, that they ignored the warning as to the consequences which such a surrender would have upon France's defence of the Maginot Line (upon which the Czech line was modelled). Ministers have been impeached for less serious offences than this.

Moreover, Czechoslovakia was forced to surrender all its most vital defences before the conditions of the settlement to be imposed upon her by the International Commission could be made known, i.e. before the future frontier had been defined, and without any guarantee that a discussion of details would be tolerated.

(2) Mr. Chamberlain in the House admitted that the line laid down at Godesberg 'did take in a number of areas which could not be called predominantly German in character'. But the Berlin Commission did what Mr. Chamberlain declined to do; it accepted the line and 'improved' upon it, by assigning to Germany further areas which were predominantly or even purely Czech in character.

For instance, to the numerous Czech communes already demanded by Germany at Godesberg there have now been added such Czech districts as the town of Polička with six neighbouring communes (11,739 Czechs and 503 Germans); a large part of the districts of Opava, Bílovec, and Příbor, including large and important industrial towns and communication centres such

as Svinov (railway junction and broadcasting station, 4,319 Czechs and 722 Germans), Trebovice (large modern power-station, 1,751 Czechs, and 71 Germans), Klimkovic (2,934 Czechs and 229 Germans), Koprivnice (large railway carriage works and the 'Tatra' automobile and aeroplane works, 3,968 Czechs and 622 Germans), Stramberk (lime and cement works, 3,497 Czechs and 46 Germans), etc. A specially striking example is the town of Krumlov in South Moravia, which together with four adjacent communes has been added to the Godesberg area, although it has a large Czech majority (3,947 Czechs and 349 Germans), and although the new frontier here now forms a very artificial and unnatural loop.

(3) The Berlin Commission, in fixing the Fifth Zone, entirely disregarded the principle of ceding only districts with over 50 per cent of Germans, but justified its action by treating the Czech areas which it ceded as compensation for the German *enclaves* and scattered German population in what remained of Czechoslovakia. In so doing they ignored the existence of similar Czech *enclaves* or minorities in the 50 per cent German districts already ceded according to the principles of the Anglo-French Plan. To sum up, the Berlin decision assigned to Germany in Northern Moravia and Silesia 254 Czech communes with 221,044 Czechs and 14,565 Germans, and in Southern Moravia 38 Czech communes, with 54,287 Czechs and 16,559 Germans.

It may be noted in passing that some of these decisions were based on the Commission's acceptance of the German demand that the statistics of the last Austrian census of 1910 should be used (instead of the Czechoslovak Census of 1930 or 1920), although that census was based not upon nationality or mother-tongue, but



upon the so-called *Umgangssprache* or 'language of intercourse'.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the Führer's assurance quoted by Mr. Chamberlain in his speech of 28 September that 'he had no wish to include in the Reich people of other races than German', it is not clear on what principle the Commission acted, unless the economic and strategic interests of Germany were allowed to override Czech national rights. For already under the Munich settlement, as revised in Berlin, no fewer than 719,000 Czechs were allotted to Germany—incidentally leaving inside the mutilated Republic 6,476,000 Czechs and 250,000 Germans (exclusive of course of the 147,000 Germans of Slovakia).

Not the least flagrant feature of the new frontier settlement is its dislocating effect upon the whole railway system of the Republic. The main railway lines connecting Prague with the Moravian capital Brno (Brünn) and both cities with the big industrial area round Moravska Ostrava and with Slovakia as a whole are now intersected by a whole series of German zones of occupation, which exercise an absolute stranglehold on the country's economic life. Thus:

(1) The Prague-Brno-Bratislava line (248 miles)

- (a) 3 miles in the sector Ustí n/O and Dlouhá Třebová.
- (b) 19 miles in the sector Semanín-Březová.
- (c) 2 miles in the Vojkovice sector.
- (d) 5 miles in the sector Pouzdraný-Popice.
- (e) 2 miles in the sector Zaječí-Rakvice.
- (f) 4 miles at Břeclav (Lundenburg). (Břeclav is

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wickham Steed, in a telling letter to *The Times*, described how he himself, then residing in Vienna as *Times* correspondent, was obliged to return himself as German, because his *Umgangssprache* was undoubtedly German.

one of the most vital railway junctions of the Republic, where the lines from Vienna and from Bratislava meet on the way to Prague and to Poland and German Silesia. That is the very reason why it has been occupied. Incidentally the racial statistics show that the town and its three adjoining communes contain 18,120 Czechs and only 1,808 Germans.

(2) The Prague-Olomouc-Přerov-Bohumin (Oderberg) line (230 miles)

(a) 3 miles, the same as in (1) (a).

(b) 40 miles in the sector Třebovice-Červanka.

(c) 23 miles in the sector Belotín-Jistebník.

If the provision of Article VI of the Munich Agreement, authorizing the Commission 'in certain exceptional cases' to recommend 'minor modifications in the strictly ethnographical determination of zones which are to be transferred', meant anything at all, it was surely intended for such cases as that of the Brno water-supply, which is now under German control, the reservoirs being situated just beyond the new frontier north of the town.

(4) In the question of a plebiscite, which the Anglo-French Plan has discarded in favour of 'direct transfer', the Munich Agreement accepts the Godesberg Plan, with the only difference that the plebiscite areas are to be defined by the Berlin Commission. Such improvement as Munich may be claimed to have brought was wiped out when the Commission subsequently abandoned all idea of holding any plebiscite.

(5) Mr. Chamberlain laid stress upon the improved conditions of evacuation, in view of the Godesberg prohibition upon the removal of 'foodstuffs, cattle, or

raw material', and said that the conditions were to be laid down in detail by the Berlin Commission. In actual fact only two days elapsed between the announcement of the line of the Fifth Zone and its actual occupation by German troops; and thus on the one hand the population was taken entirely by surprise, and on the other no details were forthcoming from the Commission.

(6) He also appeared to attach great value to the Article providing for a right of option into and out of the transferred territories within six months of the Agreement. But those acquainted with the methods adopted by the Henlein Free Corps in the occupied districts will dismiss this as almost worthless. Option will not be easy for the inmates of concentration camps or for the many who are being subjected to the same treatment as the Jews of Vienna after the Anschluss. Incidentally, no provision was made either under the Munich Agreement or by the Berlin Commission to check terrorism in the districts where option could be exercised. It is not too much to say that the Berlin Commission, though nominally supreme and not subject to any higher instance, was in practice little better than a machine for registering German dictation.

(7) Finally, Mr. Chamberlain stressed 'the new system of guarantees' as likely to give Czechoslovakia 'a greater security than she has ever enjoyed in the past'. But if we could not help Czechoslovakia when she possessed a splendidly equipped and disciplined army, almost impregnable defences and firm alliances, it may well be asked how we can hope to help her now that she is almost utterly defenceless and robbed of her many economic resources? Sir Thomas Inskip announced on the second day of the debate, that the Government felt 'under a moral obligation to treat the

guarantee as being now in force', and it soon became clear that British public opinion was keenly alive to the moral aspect of the whole question. But already next day the Prime Minister stated that the guarantee was not yet in operation, and incidentally gave no indication whatsoever as to how it was to be made effective in the event of further aggression.

### *Aftermath of Munich*

It was indeed fortunate for the Prime Minister that after the debate had lasted for four days, the House again adjourned till the beginning of November; for during the interval there was a fresh series of events which depressed the scales of Munich still further to the disadvantage of the Czechs. Immediate pressure was put upon the new Prague Government to invite the joint arbitration of Berlin and of Rome in the delimitation of the Slovak-Hungarian frontier, and thus to eliminate the two Western Powers from what had been envisaged at Munich as a further decision of the Four. By the so-called Award of Vienna Herr von Ribbentrop and Count Ciano laid down a frontier between Hungary and Slovakia which was still more contrary to all reason than that adopted between Bohemia and the Reich. For the restoration of the Danube island (Csallóköz) and the district round Nové Zámky and Levica, where the population is overwhelmingly Magyar, a good case could be made out, though it meant cutting off Slovakia from access to the Danube, save for a few kilometres to the east of Bratislava. On a purely ethnographic basis the Magyars were entitled to recover the towns of Rimavska Sobota and Rožnava; though the result has been to render communications by road and rail impossible along the whole southern border of Slovakia. But by

the cession of Košice Slovakia has been deprived of its second capital, the natural and only possible economic and cultural centre of the whole eastern half of Slovak territory: and this was done on the basis of the census of 1910. We already saw that there was a considerable injustice in basing the new situation in Bohemia on the Austrian census of 1910, not merely because this ignored the very important movement of population in the last twenty-eight years, but also because Austrian statistics did not follow purely racial lines, but laid stress on 'the language habitually spoken' (*Umgangssprache*) thereby handicapping the Czech, as against the German, element in the Austrian State. But this fact is almost negligible by comparison with the *Hungarian* census of 1910, which represents the high-water mark of Magyarization and its outward expression in the wholesale faking of statistics. This assimilationist tendency, which has been pursued with growing intensity since the forties (above all under the Dual System since 1867), was for obvious reasons especially directed against the towns, and against no town more so than against Košice and Cluj, the two key positions in Slovak and Roumanian territory. In 1880 Košice had a population of roughly only 10,000 Magyars (including Jews), as against 10,000 Slovaks and 4,000 Germans: by 1910 the Magyar-Jewish element had grown to 75 per cent. But while in that year the total population was 44,200, by 1930 it had risen to 70,200, the newcomers being in the main Slovak or Czech, with the result that in the later year the Magyars only numbered 11,200 (or 18 per cent), the Jews being entered under a separate rubric. Thus nothing more unfair, or economically disastrous, could be imagined, than to decide the fate of a prosperous and rapidly expanding town on the basis of facts questionable in

themselves and dating from before the new era of prosperity.

If possible still more scandalous was the decision to hand over to Hungary the town of Užhorod, for the last twenty years the administrative capital and cultural centre of the semi-autonomous province of Carpathian Ruthenia (Podkarpatska Rus). Poland and Hungary, for reasons which had nothing to do with self-determination, desired the restoration of the whole province to Hungary: their real object was to establish a common frontier along the Carpathian watershed and to separate Czechoslovakia from Roumania, while Poland had the further motive of preventing any expansion of Ukrainian autonomy within a stone's-throw of Eastern Galicia, where five million Ukrainians are seething with unrest and excitement owing to Poland's broken pledges and methods of 'pacification'. Germany was strong enough to impose her veto upon the transfer of Ruthenia to either Poland or Hungary, who had no racial claims upon it and an equally notorious record of oppression in the past; but she consented to the frontier being drawn in such a way as to deprive the little State of its main arable area, its three chief towns, and the whole of its transversal railway and road communications,<sup>1</sup> and forced it to set up its new capital in Chust, a glorified village lacking in all the requirements even of the remotest county town. Considerable mystery surrounds the circumstances of this transaction, some well-informed circles maintaining that Count Ciano bounced his German colleague into a decision which both regard as too

<sup>1</sup> If the Western Highlands of Scotland were a separate State, and were to be suddenly deprived of Inverness and Dingwall and forced to transfer their seat of government within one month to Tain or Dornoch, and if at the same time both the 'Great Glen' and the Highland Railway were taken from them, this would provide some sort of parallel.

unnatural to be permanent. Certainly the Czechs are entitled to claim that the Vienna Award was 'an economic monstrosity' of the first order: and we on our side are entitled to note the ignominious manner in which the British and French Governments submitted to their exclusion from Vienna, in direct defiance of the terms arranged at Munich.

There was yet another scandal to come. On 22 November it became known that there was a Sixth Zone in dispute, of which no one had ever heard at Munich. As the result of direct negotiations between Berlin and Prague (or rather of dictation by Berlin to Prague), five further frontier rectifications between Bohemia and the Reich were made, which resulted in the loss of 70 more villages, partially set off by the recovery of 27 others, but transferring not less than 60,000 additional Czechs to foreign rule. These consisted of *Domažlice*, required by the Reich in order to secure a direct railway connexion between the Egerland and the Böhmerwald; small strips of territory which were needed to secure road or railway connexions from Reichenberg to Trautenau, Hohenelbe and Bodenbach, and again between Glatz and Zittau, and finally the village and fortress of Devin<sup>1</sup> on the Danube, three miles west of Bratislava, intended as the future terminus of the Danube-Oder Canal. 'Places which since the beginning of time have been associated with our national history', so ran the official commentary on their surrender.<sup>2</sup> At the same time it was announced that the Government of Prague had consented to the construction by Germany of an

<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, Devin had always formed part of *Hungary*, not Austria, till 1918, so its seizure is a new fact based neither on race nor historical rights.

<sup>2</sup> The first of these might be compared to Lochaber or Atholl, the last to Stirling Castle, in the sentiment of the Scot

arterial road connecting Vienna with Breslau, cutting the Republic into two, and under the military and customs control of the Reich.

Mention has still to be made of the cession to Poland, who claimed the 70,000 Poles along the border of the former Duchy of Teschen which the Peace Treaties had eventually assigned to Czechoslovakia. Not only were these districts occupied by Polish troops without waiting for the final period of respite laid down at Munich (this is explained in some quarters by the fear lest the Germans should forestall them in the occupation of Bohumín and other border industries, and it is no secret that the occupying troops were instantly set to dig trenches and strengthen the existing defences against *Germany*, not Czechoslovakia); but they occupied at the same time a district double the size, to which they have no conceivable claim, and which contains 134,311 Czechs and 17,351 Germans. Thus in the name of self-determination Poland has been allowed to seize territory in which the Poles form a total of 30 per cent, and this action comes with peculiar infamy from a country which already possesses the most numerous minorities in all Europe and treats them worse than any country save Italy.

My narrative has deliberately erred on the side of baldness. Its essential features may now be summed up as follows:

(1) The policy pursued by Britain throughout the summer, of combining racial autonomy and reforms with Czechoslovak territorial integrity, is suddenly reversed in favour of partition, without discussion or consultation with the victim and by the method of a 'Diktat' from without.

(2) This 'Diktat' is carried out through five successive ultimatums—two presented by Germany to



Britain and France, and three by Britain and France to Czechoslovakia.

(3) The 'settlement' of Munich presented to Parliament and public opinion as a *fait accompli*, which can no longer be reversed, but also as the fruit of negotiation and as a distinct improvement upon Godesberg, is soon proved to have been imposed by force rather than negotiated, and to have been much worse than the terms of Godesberg, which it replaced.

(4) Within the next six weeks it was again altered for the worse in many most vital particulars, and in face of this process of deterioration the British and French Governments showed complete indifference and helplessness. The reader will ask himself how any sane mortal can regard this as a victory or describe it with 'complacency and pride'.

### *The Commons Debate*

Never have events so ruthlessly and swiftly demolished the claim of a statesman to have achieved diplomatic victory: and the above facts show that on his own showing he stands condemned. Munich was not better, but worse, than Godesberg or Berchtesgaden, and since the so-called 'settlement' neither Britain nor France have made the slightest effort to secure its observance, much less improvement.

The debate in the House of Commons suffered from its desultory character: there was much powerful criticism, but it was not marshalled into a single whole. Moreover, its effect was weighed down by a sense that the mischief had already been done and was now irreparable. But as one who has read through in *Hansard* every debate on foreign policy between 1815 and 1918, I can unhesitatingly maintain that there never was a more formidable array of facts and arguments against

the Government, nor a greater paucity of ideas in defence, than in the debate of 3-6 October 1938.<sup>1</sup> It is quite impossible to give even an abstract of all the speeches, but it may perhaps be still profitable to dwell briefly on some of the arguments adduced by the two foremost Government apologists, who rightly recognized the challenge to their procedure in the 'Inner Cabinet' of four.

The Home Secretary began by insisting on the imminence of 'the greatest catastrophe that the world has ever seen', and tried to saddle upon Mr. Dalton the view that 'as long as dictatorships exist, war is inevitable, and that it may be better to have war now' than to put it off. Mr. Dalton promptly forced him to recede from this position by making it quite clear that he shared the views of Mr. Duff Cooper as to how 'war could be prevented, both now and hereafter'. Sir Samuel Hoare went on to speak of the Prime Minister as 'mediator', speaking for 'the one country that was in a position to hold the scales between the two sides'. 'We had no treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia,' he quite rightly claimed, 'other than our general obligation under the Covenant'; but he failed to point out that these had been, perhaps inevitably, ignored, and that in the whole crisis the League machinery had never even been invoked. Then came the strange phrase: 'It would have been courting certain failure if at one and the same time when he was

<sup>1</sup> The speeches of Mr. Attlee, Sir Archibald Sinclair, Messrs. Eden, Henderson, Law, Dalton, Herbert Morrison, Amery, Mander, Lord Cranborne, Messrs. Alexander, Churchill, Acland, Sir Stafford Cripps, Messrs. Nicolson, and Noel Baker, and of Lords Cecil, Snell, and Lloyd in the House of Lords are all well worth reading. Of these no less than six came from Government supporters. The only speeches of note on the Government side were those of the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Sir Thomas Inskip; and of Lords Halifax and Baldwin and the Primate in the House of Lords

attempting to mediate, he had engaged himself upon a policy of threats and ultimatums.' It soon became clear that he was accusing Mr. Cooper of favouring an ultimatum to Herr Hitler before the Nürnberg speech—a view which Mr. Cooper promptly repudiated; but he seemed to remain quite oblivious of the fact that Hitler had twice confronted *us* with ultimatums, and that in the hope of escaping from their consequences we in our turn had thrice delivered ultimatums to Prague.

While admitting that Czechoslovakia had received 'a staggering blow', he was not there 'in a white sheet to apologize for the sacrifice, if sacrifice it be, of the Czechoslovak people', but to say that 'the facts were irresistible'. With full knowledge of all the unheard-of pressure which he and his colleagues of the Inner Cabinet had put upon Prague, he was not ashamed to tell the House that he had enjoyed the friendship of President Masaryk and President Beneš, and here he must needs drag in the name of 'the third of that great trio, General Štefánik', instead of leaving him in his grave after nineteen years. Since the Anschluss, he argued, 'the strategic frontier of the Republic was turned'; she could not have held out 'more than a month or two', and whatever the issue of a general war, 'Czechoslovakia as we know it to-day would have been destroyed', and it could not have been recreated. Pressed from the Opposition benches, he admitted that the British Government had repeatedly impressed upon Prague the need for settling the Sudeten question, and hinted that President Beneš might have 'acted more quickly'. Not a word to suggest that the Prague Government and its President had made superhuman efforts to reach an agreement, but that, as Lord Runciman clearly saw and stated in his final report, the

chief Sudeten leaders did not desire a solution and in this were acting on direct orders from Berchtesgaden—in other words, that the failure to reach a settlement was due to the fact that the question had ceased to be internal, but had become international, and that London, when it suddenly became aware of this, executed a *volte-face*. When Sir Samuel Hoare asked the Opposition what they would have done if in power, Mr. Attlee at once rejoined that it was 'the duty of France and this country' either to tell Czechoslovakia that they were standing by her, or that they could not do so, and that she must make her own terms. 'You did neither.'

Turning to the proposed international guarantee, Sir Samuel claimed that, so far from being useless, it would be 'more effective than either the Franco-Czech or the Soviet-Czech Treaties'. The Government, he added, did 'not in any way contemplate the exclusion of Russia'; and hence, with guarantees from all the five Great Powers and 'the minorities question settled', Czechoslovakia would be 'as safe as Switzerland had been for many generations'. Here he escaped from any challenge as to Switzerland's present 'safety', and went on to stress the great achievement of the two Western Powers in substituting 'for unlimited and uncontrolled military invasion a limited and controlled cession of territory under the supervision of an international body'. In those early days both he and his critics might be excused for failing to realize the farcical character of the much-vaunted International Commission: but we know now that it was from the first little better than a machine for registration of the German demands, that it exercised no control in the various questions recapitulated by Sir Samuel as coming within its 'purview' and 'terms of reference', that instead of

those 'plebiscites, working both ways', on which he insisted, plebiscites of any kind were dispensed with altogether, and that the questions of compensation and of option went virtually by default.

Special interest attaches to the references to Soviet Russia in the speech. He dealt somewhat evasively with the Opposition complaint that during the crisis there had not been 'closer consultation' with the Soviet Government. 'We were content to let the French Government take the lead in consulting with the Russian Government'; but it was 'a complete exaggeration' to say that Russia was 'cold-shouldered' by Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Next day the debate was reopened by Sir John Simon, with all his habitual forensic skill. So far from admitting the charge of mass hysteria brought against the House, he claimed that the demonstration was 'not of some craven, hysterical emotion', and that 'this popular assembly never in its history has more truly represented the sentiments of the people'. It was due not only to 'an overwhelming sense of relief at a respite', but to admiration for the Prime Minister's untiring efforts. This led him to the acute observation that the welcome accorded to Mr. Chamberlain in Germany was due not to political calculation, but above all to the gratitude felt by 'ordinary people' to a statesman striving for peace; and he backed up this unquestionably

<sup>1</sup> At this point, in answer to Mr. Dalton, he referred to my Memorandum (see above, p. 67-8) as 'substantially, I may almost say totally, inaccurate'. This rests on a misapprehension, for what I summarized was not the instructions sent from London, but the actual statements made at 2 a.m. by Mr. Newton and M. Lacroix. When Mr. Dalton asked the Government 'to lay as a White Paper an accurate statement of what the British and French Ministers did say in the small hours of 21 September', Sir Samuel Hoare replied that 'the Prime Minister will consider the request'. He did not, however, comply with the request, for what was published was not the *démarche* itself, but only the instructions telephoned to Mr. Newton

true estimate by quoting from a writer in the *Daily Herald*—an astutely chosen authority—who argued that the crisis had produced the 'odd, unexpected, and entirely uncalculated result' of making German public opinion vocal for the first time since the coming of the Nazi régime. Unhappily he did not seem to see that this was a reason for firmness rather than surrender on the part of the Prime Minister. His original visit to Berchtesgaden had been greeted in the first instance as a courageous and unconventional bid for peace, until it was realized that he returned home resolved to save that peace by sacrificing the small nation that trusted in him and his ally.

None the less Sir John had the frankness to admit that the Führer had 'again achieved the substance of his immediate and declared aim without war' and had been ready to take what he wanted by war, if France and Britain had not 'pressed' Czechoslovakia to give it him 'by cession'. But he soon qualified the effect of this by claiming that 'the French Government and ourselves did no injury to Czechoslovakia because we brought her to face the alternative 'between territorial cessions and the destruction of the State'—all the more so because Czechoslovakia had originally been created 'in defiance of the principle of self-determination' and 'by disregarding President Wilson's principles'. He did, it is true, admit that the Sudeten grievances 'are very far from being the worst that you can find in Europe', and also that 'there are many cases in which it is extremely difficult to give it [the principle of self-determination] a just application', but he left the House to infer that there was no such difficulty in the Sudeten districts.

Unfortunately there was no one there to remind him that 'self-determination' is only workable in countries

of a single race, but that to apply it in mixed districts leads inevitably to a head-on collision; that to draw an exact line of demarcation between German and Czech was a physical impossibility (since then the practical application of Munich has demonstrated this fact to the whole world), and last but not least, that under the Munich settlement self-determination was not applied, but abandoned, since no attempt was made to consult the Sudeten population, either by plebiscite or in any other way, it being simply taken for granted that Henlein's latest demands (as opposed to his earlier ones) corresponded to the general desire.

Sir John Simon then passed to criticism of Article XIX of the Covenant, and argued very cogently that 'the peaceful alteration of frontiers' still remained 'a potent cause of possible wars'. He then made perhaps the most constructive contribution in the whole speech, by answering an inquiry of Mr. Eden as to a possible 'Four-Power Pact'. While eager to devise means by which democracies and dictatorships could live side by side in peace, he strongly denied all idea of 'an exclusive Four-Power Pact' or of 'trying to exclude Russia from any future settlement of Europe', and he hoped that Russia would be 'willing to join in the guarantee of Czechoslovakia'. In conclusion, he argued that four new features had emerged during the crisis. (1) 'For the first time, as far as I know, Herr Hitler had made some concessions', and the terms of Munich were 'widely different from the brutal demand of Godesberg', being 'an orderly and agreed process in stages, containing protective provisions and operating under an International Commission, in place of a dictated ultimatum'. This contention could still be made with a certain plausibility on 5 October, before the full facts became known, but in the light of my summary on

pages 110-120 they could not be repeated to-day. (2) 'Detestation of war is not confined to the democracies,' and there is none of the war mentality of 1914. (3) 'Not all the machinery of Herr Goebbels' can destroy the contacts established between Mr. Chamberlain and the German people. (4) 'Britain has been roused, as never before, to the danger.' The Munich terms were, he contended, 'undoubtedly in form and in substance a vast improvement on the Godesberg Memorandum, but still containing drastic conditions': above all, they were also 'the only alternative' to flinging the world 'into the cauldron of immediate war'.

Sir John's oratory was persuasive as ever, but already within a month the speech was like a suit of armour riddled with bullets, so thorough was the *démenti* which events themselves had administered. Mr. Churchill, wielding his parliamentary bludgeon with deadly effect, summed up the concessions of Munich as follows: 'The German Dictator, instead of snatching his victuals from the table, has been content to have them served to him course by course. . . . £1 was demanded at the pistol's point. When it was given, £2 was demanded at the pistol's point. Finally, the Dictator consented to take £1 17s. 6d. and the rest in promises of good will for the future.' The phrase which stands out from the whole debate, and will go down to history as its motto, was again that of Mr. Churchill—'We have suffered total and unmitigated defeat.'

Parliament adjourned for a month, and when it reopened, the Prime Minister, seemingly unmoved by the growing arrogance of tone in Berlin, announced that there would be no conscription in peace-time (and therefore no possibility of meeting the dangers of war if it came), no Ministry of Supply (and therefore no central machinery to prevent the wastage and chaos



of the early stages of the Great War from ever recurring), and no preparation of an Army for Continental purposes (and thereby a recognition that France must be left to bear the entire brunt of any land war). When he and Lord Halifax visited Paris at the end of the month, more than one Paris commentator pointedly reminded them that the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia meant a loss of thirty to thirty-five well-equipped divisions on the side of the democratic Powers, and that that loss could only be made good by the training of a corresponding number of British troops. Viewed from this angle, the Victory of Munich begins to assume its true perspective as the death-knell of the voluntary system of defence.

### *The Main Results of Munich*

The full measure of the German sense of victory can only be taken by those who have studied the commentary of the inspired German Press (to-day there is no other!). A single example out of many. While *The Times* was writing upon Mr. Chamberlain's 'Impregnable Case' and 'the essential differences between Godesberg and Munich' and denouncing as 'facile and false' the view that he 'callously sacrificed a small and democratic people to the overbearing might of undemocratic Germany', the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* was declaring that the combined firmness of the Führer and vision of the Duce had succeeded in eliminating Russia from the European Concert, and in finally killing the League of Nations. But most significant of all was the immediate stiffening of tone on the part of Herr Hitler, almost before the echoes of the great debate at Westminster had died away. Speaking on 9 October at Saarbrücken, he stated that already at the beginning of 1933 he had resolved to 'bring back to the Reich'

the ten million Germans outside it (i.e. in Austria and Bohemia) and had realized that only by their own strength could this be done. The world democrats had been deaf to all the sorrows and demands of these ten millions, to the 'brazen injustices' of Versailles, and though the German people in 1938 were no longer the people of 1918, 'the only single, truthful, and sincere friend' whom Germany possessed was Benito Mussolini. As an afterthought he mentioned, though not directly by name, 'the two other statesmen who strove at the last moment to find a way to secure peace', but he at once added the warning that there must be no relaxation of effort on the part of the Reich, for 'we must be aware that at any moment a Chamberlain could be succeeded by an Eden, a Duff Cooper, or a Churchill. If these men were to obtain power, we should know clearly and beyond doubt that their aim would be to unleash immediately a world war against Germany. They do not even hide their ambitions.' Hence, though Germany had 'no claims against her neighbours', and wanted peace, he knew the Jewish-Bolshevik world-enemy, and the international Press, to be working against her, and had therefore decided to extend still further the fortifications on the Western Front, to include the Aachen and Saarbrücken districts. 'It would be well if England would free herself from certain arrogances left over from the Versailles epoch. This tutelage of foreign governesses is something which Germany cannot and will not stand. . . .'

On 6 November at Weimar Herr Hitler repeated his attack on the three statesmen, denouncing them as 'war-mongers', and saying that if Mr. Churchill, 'who seems to be moonstruck', would deal less with traitors and more with Germans, he would perhaps realize the madness and stupidity of his utterances—would realize

also that 'there are no forces in Germany that turn against the régime'. Mr. Churchill, while defending himself from the charge of war-mongering and aggression, pointed out that so far from seeing only traitors, he had seen 'at their request' Herr Henlein, the Sudeten leader, Herr Bohle, the English-born organizer of German propaganda abroad, and the *Gauleiter* of Danzig. The Führer, he argued, showed himself unduly sensitive at the suggestion that there might be 'other opinions in Germany besides his own. It would indeed be astonishing if among 80 millions of people so varying in origin, creed, interest, and condition, there should be only one pattern of thought. It would not be natural; it is incredible. That he has the power and alas the will to suppress all inconvenient opinions is no doubt true. It would be much wiser to relax a little and not try to frighten people out of their wits for expressing honest doubt and divergences. . . . Let this great man search his own heart and conscience before he accuses any one of being a war-monger.'

This was clearly not to the taste of the Führer, who resumed the polemic two days later at Munich. This time he claimed to be the 'arch-democrat' who had removed the dictatorships of Schuschnigg and Beneš, and who had an electorate of 40 million against Mr. Churchill's 15,000 or 20,000. There were the usual onslaughts on democracy, and a reiteration of the charge that to-morrow 'those who want war' might be in the Government of Great Britain or France. This attempt to brand certain statesmen in a foreign country as unacceptable to Germany and to set a ban on their accession to office surpassed for humiliating insolence any incident in modern British history. Yet Mr. Chamberlain himself, so far from entering a vigorous protest, played straight into the hands of the

Germans by his astonishing contention that criticism of the Munich settlement was equivalent to a bird fouling its own nest. Small wonder that a few weeks later some of the leading Nazi organs did not scruple to accuse some of the same statesmen with complicity in the murder of Herr vom Rath at Paris; and though questions were asked in the House, and representations were made through the Embassy in Berlin, no satisfaction was obtained, for the excellent reason that these organs only respond to forcible language, and regard with contempt the voice of restraint and 'appeasement'.

As though the lesson from these incidents were not yet sufficiently plain, it received fresh emphasis at a dinner of the Foreign Press Association in London on 13 December. Mr. Chamberlain as the principal guest, in a speech mainly confined to amiable generalities about appeasement and co-operation, included one sentence of protest against the very gross attacks of the German inspired Press upon Lord Baldwin (who a few days earlier had broadcast an appeal for the Jewish victims of the German persecution). According to the usual practice, the text of the speech was circulated beforehand, and in consequence all the German correspondents, together with the German Ambassador, absented themselves from the dinner at half an hour's notice.

It is but fair to point out the very great difference in the language employed by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. While the former claimed the Munich settlement to be 'Peace with Honour', and as resulting from negotiations, not compulsion, and treated his critics as 'war-mongers' and 'war-at-any-price men', the latter frankly admitted that the German claim 'was in fact advanced and pressed under an overwhelming show of force, which was impossible to

reconcile with the spirit of what they believed must be the basis of international relations'.<sup>1</sup>

It remains to sum up the main results of the Munich settlement. Certain points still remain obscure—the means by which the Prime Minister was won over for a policy of partition, the inner history of the *Times* leader of 7 September, the reasons for Lord Runciman's sudden *volte-face* on 16 September, full details of what passed between Mr. Newton, M. Lacroix, President Beneš, and Dr. Krofta on 20 September, the use of Colonel Lindbergh as bogey to frighten both Fleet Street and certain European Chancellories, the alleged role of a certain French financier in assuring the Stock Exchange that peace was assured, the reasons for postponing military talks between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers in spite of the latter's desire that they should take place, the substance of Lord De La Warr's conversations with MM. Litvinov and Maisky at Geneva, and, of course, the substance of the Führer's discussions with his Army chiefs. But it may fairly be claimed that the essence of the situation is contained in the narrative of events given above, and that this cannot seriously be challenged. The root of the whole matter is that the settlement of Munich was achieved by five ultimatums—two by Herr Hitler to London and Paris, three by London and Paris to Prague; that it was a 'Diktat' of sheer force, in which the victim was condemned unheard, that it was an open defiance of all democratic principles, and that the catchword of 'self-determination', though much in evidence during the crisis, was dispensed with altogether at the actual settlement.

(1) Germany, in the name of self-determination, obtained the fulfilment, at a very vital point, of the

<sup>1</sup> At Edinburgh, 24 October.

Pan-German programme, by gaining possession of strategic frontiers which she had never possessed in all history, and then disregarding that very principle of ethnography on which she had till then insisted. The frontier of Bohemia, as we saw, is one of the oldest and most natural in all Europe, and was never altered even in the worst days of Czech national eclipse and defeat. Bismarck once spoke of Bohemia as a fortress erected by God in the very heart of Europe. It was a key position for the defence of the whole Danubian area against German expansion, and that key is now under German military and economic control. The Czechoslovak Army is still in being, but most of its defensive positions have been lost, its material resources—especially in coal—are seriously reduced, and Germany has obtained the right to build a strategic arterial road connecting Silesia with Vienna, and thus cutting in half what is left of the Republic. In terms of European strategy, Germany has deprived the Western Powers of an ally possessed of a highly efficient army of 1,500,000 men and 2,000 planes: and even if the munition factories of Škoda and Vitkovice and other important war industries are not completely absorbed by Germany, and turned into a source of supply for her aggressive aims, they certainly will no longer be free to work for France or her allies, or to continue supplying the Balkan States unless they too enter the sphere of Berlin. This means a loss of thirty to thirty-five divisions in the event of war, and the loss of an air-base within striking distance of Dresden, Leipzig, and Munich.

(2) Germany has dealt a deadly blow to the cause of democracy in Europe by forcing or inducing the Western Powers to abandon the last free democracy

still surviving east of the Rhine. Since the downfall of Beneš and the intense revulsion of Czech feeling brought about by the long strain of the summer and the brutal treatment meted out by false friends, Czechoslovakia can no longer be regarded as a true democracy, or indeed as an altogether free agent in the European Commonwealth. She has suddenly become a mainly national State and has been forced by the blackmail of Slovak extremists to improvise federal forms; her parties have been quite arbitrarily telescoped together and transformed. So many organs of opinion have been suppressed or reorganized that Press freedom can hardly be said to have survived; Slovakia, with a Catholic priest as Premier, none the less imitates many of the worst vices of an intolerant and totalitarian régime and has imposed upon the Czechs a vice-Premier whose questionable relations with Poland during the crisis are known to the whole country, while unhappy Ruthenia has been deprived of her capital town, and occupies a most precarious position, as the catspaw of foreign intrigue.

The defeat of Czech democracy has been a blow to all sympathizers with that cause in all the small countries of Europe. In Yugoslavia the Stojadinović Government, which was on the very point of dealing with the united opposition on terms which it had hitherto steadfastly refused, now after Munich drew back and ordered general elections, which did not fulfil all its hopes, but assured to it a working majority and the possibility of still further postponement. In Poland, for similar reasons, the elections went heavily against the reviving democratic opposition, and the Government showed itself far less conciliatory. In Hungary Nazi agitation again raised its head, in Roumania the Iron Guard showed renewed activity,

in Greece the detestable dictatorship of General Metaxas tightened its hold upon a disgusted country. Even in the Scandinavian countries Munich had its reactions in the form of broad hints from the Reich that they would criticize Nazi methods at their peril. One of the leading Danish editors had to leave his post, and questions asked in the Norwegian Parliament were censored in the Press!

(3) Every blow directed against Czechoslovakia has at the same time been a deliberate blow to the principles of the League, and of President Wilson; for no country has been so consistently loyal to the Genevan system during the past twenty years as Czechoslovakia, no statesman has been so intimately identified with the whole working of that system as Edward Beneš, during his seventeen years at the Prague Foreign Office and, since 1935, as President; and again, no Government played so decisive a part in the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic as that of the United States, or has shown such sympathy and indignation at its abandonment by the Western democracies. There are, of course, people shortsighted enough to affect satisfaction at the failure of an experiment in world government which ran counter to human nature; such cynical phrases do not conceal their own essential bankruptcy and the lack of any practical alternative, and even the most cynical must admit that Czechoslovakia's downfall has gravely aggravated an already grave situation.

(4) At the same time Nazi Germany has eliminated yet another centre of *German* free speech and writing. Thanks to Czech 'terrorism' it has been possible for the last five years for many exiles from the Reich—mainly of the Left, but to a lesser degree of the Right also—to live in a free Republic and publish their



criticisms of the totalitarian régimes outside. To-day this is no longer the case, and the most that can be expected from the new régime in Prague is that it should not hand over these political refugees to the tender mercies of the Gestapo, and should place no obstacle in the way of their transference to Western or overseas countries. To-day German Switzerland—Basel, Zürich, Bern—is the last stronghold of German free speech and writing, and it remains to be seen how long it will be before the intimidation of Dr. Goebbels's propaganda reduces it also to silence, or at least to a cautious reticence unfamiliar to that home of ancient freedom.

(5) On an altogether lower plane stands the momentous fact that France at one blow—and, let us face the disagreeable truth, thanks largely to the blind and panic-stricken pressure of British statesmen—has lost her entire system of Continental alliances, and is in danger of becoming a second-rate Power in Europe. Her example of perfidy has filled every small State in Europe with terror and secret distrust. In particular, her action has destroyed the Little Entente altogether, by submitting to the forcible transference of Czechoslovakia from her orbit to that of Germany. Her two allies, Jugoslavia and Roumania, have been driven altogether on to the defensive (not that they ever had any aggressive aims, being concerned above all with the consolidation of the post-War status in Central Europe). They have, it is true, the Balkan Entente to fall back on, and both from the geographical and strategic point of view its powers of defence are very far from negligible; but Jugoslavia is obliged to observe extreme caution now that she has two Great Powers on her north-west frontier, while Roumania has the uncomfortable knowledge

that another Great Power on her north-eastern border possesses enormous potential strength in the near future, but that in the meantime Roumania herself may be drawn into a vortex of Ukrainian adventure. In all these hypothetical cases they now know that France can no longer be relied upon, unless there is some sudden and radical change in her internal political situation.

Scarcely less shaken is the alliance between France and Poland, who already had had good reason to distrust the Western Powers when she herself was ready for joint action against Germany to enforce observance of the Rhineland clauses of Locarno, but found to her dismay that Paris, under pressure from London, was too timorous or hesitant to move. Polish policy towards Prague during the crisis has been marked by a short-sighted cynicism which may soon bring dire punishment in its train; but its primary motive was a deep doubt as to whether France and Britain could be relied upon in any emergency, and in the eyes of Warsaw to-day that doubt has been justified tenfold. This is far from meaning that under no circumstances will Poland and France be found again on the same side; but it does mean that the alliance of recent years is dead or worthless, and that Warsaw will only renew it in the event of immediate and urgent need. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the fact that Warsaw, realizing that its scurvy attitude to Prague at the height of the crisis won no appreciation in Berlin, and angered, with all the anger of a guilty conscience, at Germany's attitude in the question of Ruthenia, has latterly recognized the wisdom of improving its relations with Moscow, for whom it has never had any pretence of cordiality, but whom it sees to possess certain common interests in the contingency

of German aggression. In all this complex bundle of problems, the tactics pursued by Imperial Germany in 1918—by the Supreme Council even more than the Government of Count Hertling or Baron Kühlmann—deserve the closest study after an interval of twenty years.<sup>1</sup>

There remains France's Pact with the Soviet Union, which was throughout the crisis ready to fulfil her obligations towards Czechoslovakia—obligations which, however, were entirely contingent upon France's observance of hers. We shall return to that most delicate problem of our day—the problem of how to estimate Russia's military and economic value under the prolonged stress of terrorist 'purges' from above—merely observing in passing that evidence is accumulating to show that there was gross and deliberate misrepresentation in high quarters in the West, and an obstinate refusal to enter upon those preliminary military discussions without which co-operation between nations are of little avail in our technical age. One thing is certain—that no amount of stupidity or even treason among statesmen can alter the basic facts of European geography. In proportion as Central Europe is organized on a basis of racial unity, political and religious intolerance, and super-centralized civil and military administration, and therefore becomes a standing menace to the liberties of the rest of the world, in exactly the same proportion will that ancient tendency of European balance acquire fresh momentum. France will again be forced to find support in Eastern Europe, for reasons of self-preservation, and in some form or other a Franco-Russian alliance will again emerge, though with infinitely more excuse than in

<sup>1</sup> An invaluable key has just been provided by Mr. Wheeler-Bennett's newly published *Brest-Litovsk: the Forgotten Peace*.

the nineties of last century. This time it is a manifest British interest to promote such an evolution, and this, given a return to saner and more courageous standards of foreign policy, should serve as a constant stimulus. But for the moment the Franco-Russian Alliance is also in suspense, pending the inevitable readjustment of French policy, and Russia is waiting, and thanks to her remoteness, can better afford to wait.

If this wholesale surrender of moral values and strategic positions be indeed a victory, as the Premiers of France and Great Britain would fain have us believe, then words simply lose their meaning. Far more consonant with the facts are those solemn words of Mr. Richard Law uttered during the great debate: 'We have now obtained, by peaceable means, what we have fought four wars to prevent happening, namely, the domination of Europe by a single Power. I see those ideas which most of us value in England, ideas of decency and fairness and liberty, at a discount in the markets of the world. I see this great Empire in very great danger in the future, with the prospect of facing a foe who is immensely more powerful than we are, and without allies to help us.'<sup>1</sup> Or in the words of Sir Archibald Sinclair,<sup>2</sup> 'One by one, in the name of appeasement—in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Spain—we were handing over the keys of world power to the keeping of the most aggressive tyrannies since Napoleon. . . . The Prime Minister's policy, not of peace but of scuttle and defeatism, was merely storing up for the successors of the present Government the hard choice between war and complete submission to the Dictators' will.' We had, in fact, submitted to the very danger which, in the words

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, 30 October, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons, 1 November.

of Sir Edward Grey, we so narrowly escaped in 1914—  
'the danger of sitting still while Germany conquered  
Europe'.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Moral Issue*

To me, however, there is another issue graver than any other. It is the moral slump which, after spreading its contagion across one Continental country after another, has suddenly lowered the whole temperature of France and Britain. The immense relief that war had at the last moment been averted—a war in which no age or profession would have been spared and of which not even the greatest military experts could predict the consequences—blinded many emotional and unthinking people to the fact that this result had been achieved by the twofold method of successive surrenders to the forces of evil, and of vicarious sacrifice. When the leaders of the Churches told us that the settlement was God's answer to 'a great tide of prayer', they can surely not have considered what they were saying; for if it be sound Christian doctrine to believe that we are justified in escaping from the grim unpleasantness of war and saving our own skins by carving up the living body of another nation, after having first undermined its powers of resistance and rendered its surrender to brute force and a tyranny of lies inevitable—if that be so, there are many who must reconsider their whole outlook to the Christian faith as expounded by many representative Anglicans and Free Churchmen.<sup>2</sup> It is true that the Primate,

<sup>1</sup> *Twenty-five Years Ago*, p. 266.

<sup>2</sup> A crass example of the stuff served up to some Christian congregations will be found in the Parish Magazine of St. —'s, —, where the Vicar, Canon —, writes of 'the sentimentalist who is weeping and wailing for Czechoslovakia, a country which most people now agree should never have had any existence. We are all sorry for the sufferings of that country,

speaking at the Church Congress, pointed out that 'power politics are an essential contradiction to Christianity', and the Bishop of Bristol lamented that 'those who are accounted "good Churchmen" devote themselves to minutiae which have no relevance at all to the turmoil of the times'. It is true also that the Primate was soon to reveal in his own person the rapid rebound from sentiment to reality, when on 18 October he admitted that 'though we are filled with thankfulness for peace, we cannot have any great enthusiasm for the terms by which peace was won'. He went on, moreover, to stress the sacrifices demanded of Czechoslovakia and its people's 'self-restraint and dignity at a time of unspeakable trial', thereby only heightening the contrast between himself and the Prime Minister, who only once found a phrase of recognition for Czechoslovakia, and never once a single good word for President Beneš, the loyal collaborator of his dead brother and many other British statesmen. Already in the House of Lords the Primate had paid his tribute to Beneš, 'who has been willing to make these almost intolerable sacrifices'; but in the rest of his speech he exposed himself to a crushing rejoinder from Lord Lloyd: 'He said in effect, what would the Czechs have got out of it if they had fought? Have nations no souls? Will they never do anything because they would be overrun? Every argument that the Primate used might have been argued in the case of Belgium. . . . Did that stop Belgium fighting? Did it stop her preserving her soul? No, because she had a gallant leader, and because we did not fail her at the last moment or go back upon our guarantee.'<sup>1</sup>

but surely they are not worth the death of one young Englishman or one broken-hearted mother.' If that were Christianity, I should prefer to be a heathen.

<sup>1</sup> 4 October—*Hansard*, p. 1416

In this connexion it is not uninteresting to note that that true Christian democrat, Monsignor Verdier, Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris, refused to sanction the ringing of church bells in his diocese in honour of the 'victory' of Munich. He doubtless felt what many Frenchmen feel to-day, that for the first time in history France had broken her plighted word, and that even if it were necessary or inevitable, it was not a cause for public rejoicing.

Lord Halifax, in his broadcast of 28 October assured his American audience (it would have been bad enough if he had only said it to his own countrymen), that his conscience was clear. Knowing his high character and sincerity (and this is no mere phrase on my part, it is my profound conviction), I was cut to the quick when I heard it, for I could not but regard it as striking proof of the gulf which has opened in this crisis between men of good will. When, on the other hand, I read Sir John Simon's assertion that 'every man and woman of honour' in this country endorsed the Prime Minister's achievement at Munich, I was merely moved to satisfaction that I was totally devoid of any vestige of such honour, and that countless men and women of every rank and party shared my feelings to the full.

The sum and substance of the whole matter is simply this. We can indeed be thankful that we in this country have been spared the horrors of a new war, which might well have proved more destructive than any in history. But when we consider the methods by which we escaped—betrayal of an ally on the part of France, insidious encouragement of that betrayal on the part of Britain, abject surrender to dictated terms on the part of us both—we can only feel shame and humiliation. Common sense bids us consider also

whether this policy (like the Danegeld at the nadir of our history) does not lead inexorably to further surrenders of the same kind, and in the end to war under far less favourable circumstances.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE LESSONS OF THE CRISIS

'FOR God's sake do not drag me into another war. I am worn down and worn out with crusading and defending Europe and protecting mankind; I must think a little of myself. I am sorry for the Spaniards, I am sorry for the Greeks, I deplore the fate of the Jews; Bagdad is oppressed, I do not like the present state of the Delta, Thibet is not comfortable. Am I to fight for all these people? The world is bursting with sin and sorrow. Am I to be the champion of the decalogue, and to be eternally raising fleets and armies to make all men good and happy? We have just done saving Europe. I am afraid the consequence will be that we shall cut each other's throats. No war, dear Lady Grey—no eloquence, but apathy, selfishness, common sense, arithmetic! I beseech you secure Lord Grey's sword and pistols, as the house-keeper did Don Quixote's armour. If there is another war, life will not be worth having. . . . May the vengeance of Heaven overtake all the legiti-mates of Verona, but in the present state of rents and taxes, they must be left to the vengeance of Heaven. I allow fighting in such a cause to be luxury, but the business of a prudent, sensible man is to guard against luxury.'

So wrote about a hundred years ago that famous wit Sydney Smith, 'The Smith of Smiths'—in his day the foremost mouthpiece of plain English humour—to Lady Grey, wife of the famous Reform Bill Premier. There is much that is seductive in the argument, and

with a few changes of phrase it represents a frame of mind much in evidence during the recent crisis. Never was British opinion so solidly pacific, so averse to war, as it is to-day, alike on ethical and material grounds. This attitude was very naturally strengthened ten-fold by the knowledge that the distinction between combatant and non-combatant tends more and more to disappear, in proportion as the new aerial arm strengthens the element of chance and recklessness in the conduct of war. Those who talk of 'war-mongers' talk with criminal levity and with malice prepense; they, like the rest of us, know perfectly well that we all—both friends and critics of the official policy—were overcome with relief when the Prime Minister's announcement about Munich gave us, at the least, a respite, and therefore that we were all for the time being abnormal.

'Nothing else matters, so long as peace is saved', so it was said by many people who ought to have known better. In reality, such a view is subversive of the whole Christian faith, of every ethical standard hitherto accepted in civilized Europe; it is in absolute conflict with the temper that has built up the British Empire in the past and still holds it together to-day. Moreover, if we view the matter from the much lower angle of mere self-preservation, we can surely not ignore the fact that the present rulers of Germany and Italy have for years been inculcating in the youth of their two nations the diametrically opposite tenet, that war is the supreme sacrifice and the supreme test of virility, and it therefore follows that by announcing our rejection of war under all circumstances, we shall not avoid it, but merely incite our opponents to attack us. To suggest that there are no objects for which it is worth fighting is something worse than mere defeatism; it is

treason to humanity, to democracy, to religious faith. Moreover, to pose the question that faced us all last September as merely the question whether 'we' must fight for Czechoslovakia—'a country of which we know nothing'—was to distort the whole issue. If we had fought, it would have been because British interests, the cause of democracy and liberty, and the hopes of upholding an international order in the place of the returning 'European anarchy', were all inseparably bound up with the test case of one small country, occupying, to its misfortune, a key position in the strategy of the Continent, and, to its own lasting honour, a very ancient place in the history of intellectual and political liberty.

### *The Constitutional Issue*

There is also a constitutional aspect to the question. It has only gradually become apparent, but to-day it is no longer denied on any side, that the fall of Mr. Eden, the best qualified and most courageous Foreign Secretary of recent times, marked the reversal of our whole foreign policy. Since March 1938 it has become the personal policy of the Prime Minister to an extent for which there is no precedent. Palmerston had spent fifteen years at the Foreign Office before he became Premier; Salisbury had already acquired great foreign experience when he decided to combine the two offices. Mr. Chamberlain has won his reputation as a business man, as a financier, as a municipal and party leader; till 1937, and until the age of 68, foreign politics lay altogether outside his sphere of action. He does not know his Europe, and was accustomed in the main to accept the views of his more expert brother, Sir Austen. Yet the entire initiative of foreign policy is now in his hands, and Mr. Eden's

successor as Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, as a member of the House of Lords, occupies a relatively effaced and secondary position.

During these months of crisis the Prime Minister has conducted crucial negotiations with foreign statesmen without taking the Foreign Secretary with him (as Disraeli wisely did at the Congress of Berlin), at the same time passing over all the high permanent officials of the Foreign Office, with their unique experience of European affairs, and relying upon a distinguished civil servant whose knowledge and skill lies in the sphere of industrial disputes, and not in foreign affairs. He has done this during the parliamentary recess, steadily refusing a series of appeals that Parliament should be summoned, and deliberately confronting both Parliament and public opinion with one accomplished fact after another.

As if all this were not sufficiently disquieting, there has gradually emerged an 'Inner Cabinet' of four, consisting of the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, supplemented by the two ex-Foreign Ministers in the Cabinet. On first thoughts this might seem a sound innovation, on the presumption that their past experience might supplement the admitted inadequacy of the two constitutional factors. But a very little reflection will remind the reader that Sir John Simon and Sir Samuel Hoare are the two men more responsible than any others for the plight in which our foreign policy now stands, and for the successive retreats which have now ruined the League and left the Dictators triumphant in their contempt for all save brute force. The name of the former will always be identified in history with the Manchurian fiasco and with the failure of the Disarmament Conference, that of the latter (in conjunction with M. Laval's)

with the betrayal of Abyssinia, the Genevan bluff of September 1935, and the surrender of the following December. If there are two men in the country whose past records should debar them from any share in the conduct of British foreign policy, they are Sir John Simon and Sir Samuel Hoare. It is said that at the height of the crisis the younger Ministers resented their exclusion from the counsels of the inner ring, but they do not appear to have vindicated their undoubted constitutional right. It is of course only fair to add that the ungainly size of the full Cabinet is a standing incitement to the establishment of small sub-committees.

Not the least wise feature of the British Constitution has been the elasticity of the treatment always reserved for foreign policy, and the consequent scope for evolutionary methods and for action in times of emergency, and it would be unjust to speak of any actual direct infringement. None the less, the present Prime Minister's conduct of foreign policy runs counter to the whole tradition of the last century and a half; it is only necessary to compare it with that of any of his predecessors from Pitt, Liverpool, and Peel to Aberdeen, Gladstone, and Balfour (to say nothing of Bonar Law, MacDonald, and Baldwin), to see that this is so. We are in danger of returning to the days when Edmund Burke spoke of 'a new control, unknown to the Constitution, an interior cabinet which brings the whole body of government into confusion and contempt'.<sup>1</sup>

No one can contend that the methods by which the crisis was solved were democratic; for Mr. Chamberlain refused throughout to consult Parliament or public opinion, but also prevented his victim from consulting its Parliament and public opinion, and finally forced

<sup>1</sup> *Thoughts on the Cause of Present Discontent* (1770).

upon it at the shortest possible notice a solution which violated the very foundations of its Constitution and administered a deadly blow to the whole democratic evolution of Central Europe. It is for all responsible and thinking members of Parliament in this country to ensure that our foreign policy should once more be conducted on democratic lines and in the true spirit of the Constitution. It may be that in such abnormal times as these exceptional measures are required, such, for instance, as the formation of a Foreign Affairs Committee on French lines, or occasional resort to secret Sessions. But it is difficult to believe that under any circumstances a small clique of four can ever be a satisfactory substitute for a Foreign Secretary relying upon responsible and expert officials, devoting his whole time and attention to foreign issues, extracting the essence of his knowledge for the information of a Premier whose main efforts must necessarily be given to domestic problems, and submitting reasoned statements to his cabinet colleagues at moments of crisis.

To these general observations on the constitutional aspect of affairs may be added the weighty criticism of Mr. Duff Cooper, who in his speech of resignation felt impelled to say that for the Prime Minister to sign the Declaration of Munich, 'without consulting with colleagues, allies, or Dominions, and without the assistance of any expert diplomatic advisers, is not the way in which the foreign affairs of the British Empire should be conducted'.<sup>1</sup>

### *The New Balance of Forces in Europe*

Still more vital are the foreign issues involved, and it remains to pass in review the altered situation in Europe.

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*. 3 October, p. 38.

This book has been written as a sequel to two earlier volumes—*Britain in Europe*, a survey of our foreign policy from 1789 to 1914, and *Britain and the Dictators*, an attempt to survey post-War British policy up to the spring of 1938. While the latter was still passing through the press, events resumed their catastrophic march, and have already modified some of its conclusions. I propose therefore to summarize as briefly as possible my original argument and then to examine it afresh in the light of the new European situation created by the disappearance of Austria and the overthrow of Czechoslovakia.

Two facts were put forward as fundamental—first, that for the two Western Powers ‘the crux of the whole European situation is the German problem’, and that ‘an agreement with Italy is no substitute for an agreement with Germany’, whereas the latter would probably mean the stabilization of European peace for a whole generation to come; and second, that thanks to the successive failures of the League system, the problem has to be solved, no longer within the framework of collective security and international accord, but according to the ‘great game’ of Power Politics. Viewed from this angle Europe is seen to consist on the one hand of the Five Great Powers, following three different ideologies and forming two compact groups—the Western Democracies, and the Powers of the Rome-Berlin Axis, with Russia enjoying a certain geographical aloofness and almost equally uncertain as to the attitude of her French ally and her German enemy. On the other hand, it consists of no less than twenty medium or small States, which may for the most part be classified under groups—the northern (Belgium and Holland, the three Scandinavian kingdoms and the four Baltic republics); Switzerland,

land-locked, but enjoying an altogether unique tradition and certain geographical advantages, though increasingly nervous as to its neutral status; Spain and Portugal, only too keenly aware that their ancient isolation is no longer valid in the modern world; Poland, the 'would-be Great Power', handicapped by the possession of eight millions of unwilling non-Polish subjects; the Little and Balkan Ententes (in which Roumania and Jugoslavia formed a common factor, but Czechoslovakia, though occupying the most exposed position, was on the whole the guiding spirit) which sought to emancipate itself and its allies from that tutelage of the Great Powers which had been so long the bane of the lesser nations and in the Balkans had actually delayed their national revival. In one phrase, a motley and widely scattered constellation, which might acquire cohesion around one or more central planets, or might alternatively dissolve into its component parts.

The system established by the Peace Treaties assured to the small nations greater security than ever before; for the first time a real say in the counsels of the world, on something like equal terms; and a status, as it were, as part of the public law of Europe. Moreover, for the first time, as part of that public law, recognition was accorded to racial and religious minorities, and though many of the details were still allowed to remain on paper, sound foundations had been laid, on which a new order could gradually be built up. The reversion to Power Politics meant a renewed menace to the small nations, their relegation to the background of international diplomacy, and a tendency to regard binding pledges towards minorities as derogatory to the dignity of a first-class Power. If Force divorced from Law was to be the basis of world



affairs, the lesser States would soon only exist on sufferance.

This new development was peculiarly disquieting to Britain, which as a World Power is much more vulnerable under modern conditions, and more than ever anxious for peace, since she seems to have reached her utmost limit of expansion and since there is literally no part of the world in which war can break out without injuriously affecting her interests. Renewed war on a grand scale would, it is realized, impose a severe strain upon the financial and economic resources even of so rich a country as Britain still is, and if at all prolonged would probably result in profoundly modifying the whole social structure of this and other States. Hence the primary aim of British policy must always be to re-establish that identity between British interests and the Genevan system which existed for the first decade and a half after the War. Obviously, if we attempt to define 'British interests' in a sense incompatible with the legitimate aims of the other Great Powers, we shall confront those Powers, without whose support the League cannot be made effective, with an awkward dilemma. Conversely, a policy of narrow egotism will expose us to far greater perils than in the past, since our wide-flung interests in both hemispheres involve corresponding commitments. In isolation we are in constant danger of concerted attack, and the breakdown of the collective system forces us to seek powerful allies, in which case undiluted egotism again becomes dangerous. What Sir Eyre Crowe wrote in 1907 is truer than ever to-day. 'The danger [of a hostile combination] can in practice only be averted—and history shows that it has been so averted—on condition that the national policy of the insular and naval State is so directed as to

harmonize with the general desires and ideals common to all mankind.’<sup>1</sup>

There are certain fundamentals in our policy which can be quite briefly summarized. To-day, as much as ever in the past two centuries, we are concerned for the security of the Low Countries and the narrow seas, whose possession by an aggressive Power would constitute a deadly menace to the heart of the Empire. To-day, even more than in the past two centuries, we are bound to oppose any bid for hegemony in the Mediterranean, which is not only a highway for our Eastern trade, but in which our commitments have been increased by post-War developments in the problems of Egypt, Palestine, and Arabia. Moreover, viewed from the more materialistic angle of British naval interests, the Eastern Mediterranean, as a source of oil fuel, has acquired the same sort of importance as the Baltic in sailing days, as a source of hemp and tar and timber.

We need not—to quote Canning’s phrase—‘in the foolish spirit of romance suppose that we alone could regenerate Europe’, and indeed the day has long since passed when Hobhouse proclaimed that ‘the honour of England was involved in the preservation of the free institutions of the Continent’, and when Palmerston now and then tried to put this maxim into practice. To-day it is common ground among the parties that it is not our business to seek the overthrow of this or that foreign régime unless it becomes a direct menace to our own institutions. One of the few points where Mr. Chamberlain and his critics agree is his stubborn insistence on the absurdity of supposing that any political régime is unchanging;<sup>2</sup> of course the implication is that the Nazi régime also will go the way of

<sup>1</sup> *British Documents*, Ed. Gooch and Temperley, iii, p. 422

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Chamberlain, after laying this down in his Guildhall speech of

all flesh long before the thousand years of which the Führer speaks in moods of exaltation. It is a natural corollary to this that an attempt from the outside to change a political régime almost invariably produces the opposite effect of rallying even lukewarm opinion in its defence. On the other hand, we are not far from a position in which the tables are turned upon us; for Britain and France seem no longer able to defend kindred democracies when attacked, even when fully aware that the aggressor will augment his own possessions by every successive conquest.

The League of Nations was conceived as a substitute for the pre-War game of Power Politics, but in proportion as its machinery is put out of action by the Dictator Powers, considerations of the Balance of Power force themselves upon us once more. For four centuries past we have instinctively opposed any attempt, whether from the side of France, Spain, Germany, or Russia, to establish a hegemony in Europe, or even in the Near and Middle East. The events of the last five years seem to suggest that the decision of the Great War—which for the time being destroyed the dream of ‘Mittel-Europa’—is in process of being reversed, and we are therefore confronted by the difficult choice of throwing our full weight into the opposite scale from Germany, or for the first time in history joining forces with the predominant Power.

Even before the recent changes in the distribution of forces in Central Europe, it had become clear that France and Britain were bound together by the most vital necessities of geography, numerical strength, and self-preservation, and were being forced, willynilly, 9 November, repeated it in his address to the Foreign Press Association on 11 December; it is alleged that this, and not his gentle defence of Lord Baldwin against Nazi rudeness, was the reason why Herr Hitler ordered the abstention of the German journalists.

into ever closer military co-operation. It may be regarded as axiomatic that neither Power, however obtuse or perfidious its leaders for the moment might be, will dare to cut itself adrift into an isolation fraught with appalling dangers. Hence, Germany will be well advised to assume that under no circumstances can Britain's friendship with her be purchased at the expense of France. The strategic interests which Britain shares with France in the Low Countries, on the Rhine, on the Atlantic seaboard, and in the Western Mediterranean are supplemented by a common devotion to certain principles of democracy and liberty which go far deeper than such external trappings as universal suffrage or party government, and are determined by a habit of mind which places the individual higher than the State.

Here unquestionably is an 'ideological' link between the two countries which applies with still greater force to the relations between Britain and America. For if the two chief English-speaking nations have often shown a rare gift for misunderstanding each other, for repudiating kinship, for resenting advice and detecting ulterior motives where none exist, this is at least partially due to a tacit perception of the extent to which their very divergent psychologies rest none the less upon common ideals and aspirations. It may therefore be laid down as fundamental to our policy, if sanely conducted, that it must never run counter to the basic tradition of the United States; that alliance or binding treaty is not desired on either side, but that it is perfectly practicable to keep the relations of the two countries on a higher and safer plane than those of Britain with any other country, and that the evolution of America's relations with Canada and Australia render this both more necessary and more possible.

Can Britain reach a real and permanent accord with Germany without sacrificing any of the above axioms of policy? It must be laid down quite clearly from the start, that such an understanding cannot be effected piecemeal; concessions in one field, for instance, the colonial, must be contingent on agreement in every other field. Moreover, our aim is not a mere bilateral bargain, but a return to the international order, modified in such a manner as to be acceptable to the seceders from Geneva. Unless Germany consents to this, on honourable terms, any arrangement we may make is mere opportunism, to avert some immediate danger, but not the ultimate goal on which all European consolidation depends. It must be brought home to German opinion, if there be such a thing to-day, and to the German Government, that we do not aim at transferring our alliance from France to Germany, and do not intend to go beyond the point to which we can carry France with us; that German friendship is not worth to us the alienation of America; and that though Russia concerns us much less vitally than either France or America, we do not believe that true peace can be promoted by a bargain, even tacit, with one Power for the carving-up of another. We are in any case drawing near to the point at which we can no longer, as at Munich, use the property of others as the object of bargaining, and must be prepared to pay with our own. I have no hesitation in admitting that Germany has a legitimate grievance in respect to colonies—not a legal claim, for her colonies were conquered in fair fight, but a moral claim in view of the fifth of Wilson's Fourteen Points, and on the ground that as a Power of the first magnitude she is in a position of unfair inferiority. We should also do well to remove the absurd stigma imposed upon Germany,

and admit that although like other colonial Powers she has certain crimes on her conscience, it is monstrous to suggest that she is inherently unfit to administer colonies. On the other hand a serious effort ought to be made to bring home to German opinion the fact that the recovery of her former colonies will in no way solve the problem of pressure of population at home and only slightly relieve her shortage of raw material, and again, that any bargain between us must take the most serious account of the native problem and include really effective guarantees for the treatment of those populations towards whom we have in these twenty years undertaken obligations. Subject to these provisos, and to the assumption that the bargain was linked with a restoration of international order, the principle of arbitration and an all-round reduction of armaments, it seems to me that we should do well to show extreme generosity, instead of offering Germany what in the same breath we tell our own people is worthless. In other words we might consider, under certain circumstances, the cession of other colonies besides those which she has lost, and should consent to a very wide extension of the mandate system, and make a serious attempt to assure a better distribution of raw materials among all nations. But at every point of the argument we revert to one fundamental point: such concessions must be contingent on the acceptance of the international order—drastically reformed, it may be, but emphatically not abolished. For as long as the present 'International Anarchy' prevails, based upon Power Politics and the elimination of the weak, we should be mad to cede one square foot of territory, and must pay more attention to airports and submarine bases and food-supply than to abstract principles of justice. And here too we come back to the sheer

madness of isolation, for on the basis of Power Politics and unrestricted arming we can only dispense with allies if we are prepared to turn Britain into a vast armed camp, and squander the reserves of the leisured class and the savings of the masses in such a manner as to transform for the worse the whole structure of society and of the State.

### *Difficulties of an Anglo-German Understanding*

How far has the prospect of an understanding on the above lines been promoted by the events of last spring and autumn in Central Europe?

It is abundantly clear that as a result of the Franco-British surrender at Munich there has been a radical disturbance in the balance of forces on the Continent, France and Britain having virtually proclaimed their *désintéressement* in the East and being reduced by the betrayal of actual or contingent allies to a defensive position even in the West. Germany has not merely added ten millions to her population, but has gained possession of a central strategic position in Europe, which in hostile hands might have gravely endangered her whole scheme of defence, but which now offers an admirable point of departure for her own aggressive designs. The Little Entente has ceased to exist, the Balkan Entente has withdrawn to a position of nervous but vigilant detachment, Poland has even less reason than in 1934 and 1935 to rely upon a French Alliance, while Soviet Russia plays a waiting game in the background.

To those who seek enlightenment as to British policy the Prime Minister, who has admittedly assumed its full direction since Mr. Eden's fall in February 1938, only offers the most meagre generalities. His inaugural speech on taking office did not go beyond a resolve,

firstly, to maintain peace, and, secondly, to 'make Britain so strong as to be treated everywhere with respect'. This was supplemented at Munich by a sheet of paper expressing (a) the capital importance of Anglo-German relations for all Europe; (b) the desire of the two peoples never to go to war with one another; and (c) 'the method of consultation' as a means of removing future dangers to peace.

This, under the general term of 'appeasement' was reiterated at the Guildhall banquet and on other occasions. Only here and there has the veil been lifted; for the Government's intentions on concrete points of policy we are left entirely to conjecture.

Mr. Chamberlain after his talks with the Führer twice quoted him as saying that, once the Sudeten question was solved, Germany would advance no further territorial claims, and though the German official Press hastened to qualify this as meaning 'no new claims not already advanced' (in other words, leaving the still unsatisfied claim to the colonies on the one hand and to all territory inhabited by Germans on the other), it does seem as though the whole emphasis is being transferred eastwards. Last May the Führer had already solemnly assured the Duce that the Brenner frontier was irrevocable. The question of Alsace-Lorraine, already declared closed in *Mein Kampf*, and specifically renounced in the Reichstag speech of May 1935, seemed to be finally eliminated by the Franco-German Pact of November 1938. During the same year public assurances were given by the Reich to Belgium and Switzerland, which does not, however, prevent them and other small States from feverishly rearming. The inference drawn in many circles is that Germany has been bought off in the West by a free hand in the East, and that she is being



encouraged to 'eat bear'. It is still remembered that about the time of the *Montreal Star* article (see p. 39), the Secretary for War is alleged to have coined the still more drastic phrase that Germany should be encouraged to 'get her bellyful in Eastern Europe'—presumably in the calculation that a Russo-German war would exhaust the two combatants and relieve pressure upon the two Western democracies. The bone of contention between the two would presumably be the fate of the Border States, and above all of the Ukraine, which Hitler in *Mein Kampf* treats as suitable for German colonization.

Another aspect of this question is brought out by an anecdote circulating widely in Paris last summer. When the French Premier and Foreign Minister visited London to take stock of the changes wrought in Europe by the Anschluss, the former discussed with Mr. Chamberlain the position of Czechoslovakia, and would not admit that there was serious ground for alarm on the part of the Czechs, since both France and Russia were resolved and able to defend her if attacked. To this Mr. Chamberlain is alleged to have replied that it would be 'disastrous if Czechoslovakia were to be saved by Soviet help'. Whether or not this actual phrase was uttered, it is known to correspond very exactly to the outlook of an important section of the British Cabinet, and indeed a few months later the Western Powers allowed Czechoslovakia to perish rather than commit themselves to those military conversations with Russia, which, if held in time, might have turned the scale against aggression.

Such reasoning as lies behind this alleged remark is far too *simpliste*. It ignores the possibility that if Western Europe holds aloof, Germany might expel Russia from the Ukraine without undue diminution

of strength, and after buying off the short-sighted Poles with suitable bribes, might then be irresistible, and able to impose her will on the West (and this is what the 'forward' group of Nazi Germany believes to be practicable). Conversely, there is that still more ominous possibility that Russia, disgusted at French disloyalty and British stupidity, might invert the whole position by coming to terms with Germany, as so many of the leading soldiers in both countries have always desired. In that event Poland would be the obvious victim, and Germany, with Central and South-eastern Europe incapable of resistance, would be free to concentrate her efforts in a westerly direction.

Meanwhile the hope of breaking the Rome-Berlin Axis is seen to be a mere childish illusion, unless and until the Western Powers can show a crushing military superiority over Germany, in which case the black-mailer might try to double-cross. Count Ciano would have us believe that Italy was already mobilizing secretly at the height of the crisis, and would at once have thrown her whole weight on to the German side. But though it is far more probable that she would have acted according to the famous maxim, '*Voler au secours du vainqueur*', it must for the present be assumed that the two Powers have found great profit in portioning out Europe into spheres of interest, Germany concentrating on the Danubian lands and Italy on the Mediterranean, and by the ardour of their mutual support leaving the rival Powers in a permanent state of doubt as to the lengths to which either of them is prepared to go. They certainly do not everywhere see eye to eye; for instance, Germany cares little about Spain, save as a means of engaging Italy on the German side, of embarrassing France and Britain, and of trying out certain instruments of war that need testing. But

far transcending this, the Axis pursues certain joint fundamental aims—(1) to eliminate the small Powers from any share in major decisions, and where necessary to use them as 'the small change of European diplomacy'; (2) to re-establish the monopoly of the Great Powers in Europe, but to correct this in their own favour by the isolation and exclusion of Russia; and (3) simultaneously to use Japan, outside Europe, in order to neutralize the United States. For us to connive at this is astonishingly naïve; for it puts the Western Powers automatically on the defensive: 2 *v.* 2 may be given the algebraical form of 2 *v.* 1 plus ?1 (two united versus two divided), since France finds herself in a minority while Britain oscillates uncertainly between Paris and Berlin-Rome. The Bismarckian maxim of 1880—'Try to be *à trois* in a world governed by five Great Powers'—acquires to-day a new significance, and may be (now that there are five, not six, Great Powers in Europe) linked together with Mr. Lloyd George's recent phrase, 'the leaving out of Russia was the fundamental mistake of the Government's policy'.<sup>1</sup> Expressed in terms of population, the present situation is 80 plus 40 (Germany-Italy), versus 46 plus 43 (Britain-France), plus the more doubtful combinations of 30 (Poland) and 56 (Balkan Entente). Add the 180 of Russia, and the whole formula is completely transformed, and the possibility of the hegemony of a single Power reduced to a minimum; withhold them, and it is difficult to see how the balance recently established to our disfavour can ever be redressed.

Those who argue in favour of keeping Russia within the European commonwealth have no illusions as to the grave difficulties involved; but they believe these to be outweighed by still more peremptory considerations.

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, 9 November 1938.

In the first place, they are not thereby renouncing the idea of an Anglo-German understanding. On the contrary, they believe that without Russia as a make-weight Germany will never modify her blind faith in force as the only solvent of human affairs. On the basis of Power Politics, to which the world has admittedly been reduced, and which leave Geneva in temporary abeyance, our only hope is to convince our adversaries that in the event of a conflict we, and not they, will have the big battalions and the decisive economic resources on our side. Secondly, the abnormal conditions in Russia produced by the internecine feud between Stalin and the Old Bolshevik party are not only repellent in themselves, but create complete uncertainty in every field and render both personal contacts and reliable information infinitely difficult and precarious. Despite many clear signs of evolution in a nationalist, but also in a less doctrinaire and less totalitarian, sense, Russia remains a gigantic note of interrogation, and so little is known of her public men and her admittedly fluid institutions that the West may be excused for hesitating to link its fate with such associates in the event of another world war. But as no such considerations in any way alter the mathematical and geographical considerations outlined above, it is necessary to promote contacts wherever possible, instead of preserving an attitude of reserve and negation. Here again, there can be no possible objection on the basis of Power Politics; it is agreed on all sides, that a difference of ideologies is not necessarily an obstacle to good foreign relations between two countries, and there are many who hold that we can make overtures to, and establish most cordial relations with, a Fascist or Nazi Government, without for a moment endorsing Fascist or Nazi views, and to take

one instance out of many, that the treatment meted out by those Governments to Jews, Catholics, or Protestants has no bearing whatsoever upon inter-State relations. If they are logical they will of course admit that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and will not worry further about the odious purges by which all the original Bolsheviki have been exterminated and Russia transformed from a 'Communist' State into something for which there is as yet no term in our political vocabulary.

It is necessary, before going farther, to admit that a divorce between foreign relations and domestic ideologies is becoming increasingly difficult, thanks to the spread of totalitarian views far more intolerant and all-pervading than in past epochs. If already in the sixties De Tocqueville complained of the progress made in '*l'art d'étouffer le bruit de toutes les résistances*', he would be consumed with wonder and alarm at the further progress achieved, both in suppression of resistance and in diffusion of unanimity by an educational sausage-machine, by 'radio-active' auto-suggestion, and by a controlled Press. The Dictators, who on first coming to power insisted that their political wares were not for export, now lose no opportunity of proclaiming that democracy is effete, and liberty an illusion. Mussolini tells us that 'a Fascist Europe' is in sight, and that 'either we or they, either our ideas or theirs', will triumph, while Hitler warns against the belief 'that in so small a house as Europe it is possible to have differing conceptions of right', and is genuinely angry if any one dares to throw doubt upon his own patently absurd theory that National Socialism is destined to rule for a thousand years.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> If no innate sense of humour warns him against this absurdity, he might reflect on the history of the Golden Tooth, discovered in a newborn child

What is not sufficiently realized is the ironic fact that both Dictators learned their propagandist methods from the Comintern and are making them year by year more perfect and more all-embracing, while their original authors have been ruthlessly swept from power in successive purges. And indeed it was above all a difference of ideological outlook that produced the deadly conflict between the Stalinists and the 'Old Bolshevik' Guard, the latter insisting upon immediate World-Revolution as the supreme aim, while the former put practice above theory and were first of all bent upon consolidating the new Russia, content to believe that if it succeeded it would become an irresistible centre of attraction to the outside world, but that in any case it was their and Russia's unique contribution and must at all costs be saved. Without peace this vast, half-baked experiment would be jeopardized, and it therefore became essential to renounce militant propaganda abroad and to accept such *bourgeois* instruments of appeasement as the League and the Kellogg Pact.

Till the advent of Hitler the 'pure Bolsheviks' were in every country working for the overthrow of democracy, but in proportion as National Socialism grew more aggressively anti-democratic, the more far-sighted elements in Moscow realized that, whatever might be their ultimate hopes, their immediate and vital interest lay in checking the democratic rout in Europe. Thus a middle way of policy took shape, eschewing the revolutionary frenzy of Trotsky and the Germanophil promptings of the General Staff, and accepting League membership, close co-operation at Geneva, and all that it implies. Indeed it is no

in Silesia in the sixteenth century, and supposed to usher in a Golden Age of a thousand years in Germany.

exaggeration to say that for the last five years, since Stalin and Litvinov reversed the policy of Trotsky and Chicherin, Russia has followed a logical and European policy, punctiliously fulfilling her engagements, and throwing her weight in favour of peace and international co-operation, whereas since the policy of Stresemann and Brüning gave way to that of Hitler and Goring, Germany has no less consistently followed anti-European and hegemonistic aims, and has repeatedly violated not only the treaties which she denounces as unjust, but other treaties into which she entered voluntarily, and the public pledges by which she sought to lull Europe into a false security.

If we carry our analysis one step farther, we see that Russia, despite all the faults inevitable in a régime that is the outcome of prolonged civil war and revolution, has a definite interest in the preservation of general peace, in the maintenance of the *status quo*, and in the survival of that greatest of all international experiments, the League of Nations and collective security. On the other hand we see that the only real challenge to the existing order in Europe comes from Germany and her Fascist ally, and that they do not attempt to conceal their hostility to any kind of international order, to any reinstatement of the League as the decisive factor in the world. Moreover, there is to-day not only no conflict of territorial interests between Russia and Britain, but each has a definite interest in maintaining the territorial integrity of the other. The conquest of the Ukraine by Germany, or of the Maritime Province by Japan, would be equally detrimental to British interests, while the downfall of the British Empire would probably be the signal for a concentrated attack upon Russia from East and West. Nowhere is the community of interests between Russia and Britain

more obvious than in the Far East, and, as was only natural, this has been more fully realized in Australia and New Zealand—even in the most conservative quarters—than in the home country. There is another country in which this is increasingly recognized, namely, the United States, and there are many signs that in proportion as American official and unofficial opinion is disillusioned at the recent vacillating and anti-democratic policy of Britain, it will welcome closer Russo-American co-operation in the Pacific. Nothing was more significant during the crisis than the firm attitude adopted by President Roosevelt towards Herr Hitler; and American indignation at the surrender was naturally heightened by the cavalier manner in which Munich was rushed through without any attempt to consult or notify Washington. Yet the reactions of America are far more vital to us than those of any other country, since they are based on real democratic affinities and a common tradition of free institutions, to a far greater extent than on common blood. Indeed it is hardly too much to say that only the co-operation of the two great English-speaking communities—the British Empire and the United States—can still save the world for democracy, and that the vagaries of British policy in the last year are placing this cause in real jeopardy.

To sum up this section of the argument, it may be affirmed that without Russia there can be no readjustment of forces in the European commonwealth, and that Germany's desire to isolate her is far more strategic than ideological; and again, that without America democracy becomes halting and lop-sided, and that to separate her from us is the main objective of the Axis Powers, since they count upon involving the Empire in Pacific troubles and thereby



achieving superiority in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

*'Appeasement' and 'Danegeld'*

Mr. Chamberlain has defined his adventure in foreign policy as one of 'appeasement', and in so far as he meant to express the desire of the entire British people to maintain peace and friendship with all nations, and not least of all with the German Reich, he was following a sure instinct. Unfortunately the phrase is vague and open to misconstruction, for it does not face up to the fundamental issue, that peace can neither be attained by yielding to dictation nor by suppression of awkward facts. We must first have the certainty that the State with which we are bargaining respects law, order, and justice at home, and in the foreign sphere puts the Rule of Law above the Rule of Force. Without this no guarantees are possible, and concessions are only a peculiarly futile form of Danegeld. A century ago the third Lord Londonderry, speaking in the House of Lords, said that 'peace might always be purchased, provided the sacrifice offered were sufficiently great',<sup>1</sup> but what would he have said to a peace such as Mr. Chamberlain brought home from Munich, where a respite for ourselves was purchased by the sacrifice of another people? The price of peace cannot be paid vicariously, and so far we have shown no sign of readiness to make any sacrifice of *our own* in its cause.

What renders the prospects of a real accord so infinitely less promising to-day than even a year or six months ago, is that official Germany not only proclaims Force as the basis of policy and resolutely rejects any return to the collective system, but shows complete disregard for the fundamental conceptions of law

<sup>1</sup> 6 May 1834.

at home. After the thirtieth of June Herr Hitler justified a series of executions in defiance of any form of law, by declaring that 'for twenty-four hours I was the supreme Court of the German nation'. Last year, Pastor Niemoller, *after his acquittal by a German Court*, was rearrested by order of the Gestapo and has ever since been detained in prison and subjected to what amounts to prolonged mental torture, without any pretence at trial. Since March 1938 Herr von Schuschnigg, the lawful head of an independent Government, has been closely imprisoned and threatened with trial by a German Court which under no conceivable theory can have lawful jurisdiction over him. After the Anschluss one of the first acts of the new régime was to do public honour to Planetta and the other murderers of Chancellor Dollfuss; their remains were transferred to 'graves of honour', wreaths were laid by the Chief of the Secret Police, and another prominent Nazi leader, Herr Hess (the organizer of the anti-British campaign in the Arab world), spoke in glorification of these martyrs to the German cause. And all this is the work of a régime which has since visited upon an entire race, the most violent reprisals ever planned, because of a political crime committed by an unbalanced youth of seventeen, driven to frenzy by the fate of his parents. The anti-Jewish Pogroms of November 1938 are the culminating proof that the great German legal tradition is a thing of the past, and has been superseded by blackmail on a vast scale. The Reich is engaged in selling to us the naked bodies of destitute Jews whom it has plundered—selling them for good sterling, which it needs for yet further armaments. The modern Samaritan is faced by an altogether novel problem: he will have to pay up, or the victims will die. But it is to be hoped that he will take

warning at the eleventh hour, and at least not consent to financing the blackmailers as some people would have him do. There seems no doubt that the murder of Herr vom Rath was merely the occasion for carrying out plans already carefully prepared since the summer for filling a depleted exchequer; persistent rumours that something was afoot were partially responsible for the slumps on the Berlin Bourse in July and August. The plan had to be postponed during the height of the European crisis, but within a few weeks of Munich the Führer's advisers, elated at their success and knowing the urgency of the financial situation, recommended a monster fine of £86,000,000 upon the Jewish community of Germany, in the confident belief that this fresh *coup* could be effected with complete impunity and would indeed make a great 'impression' on the world at large. They were both right and wrong in their reckoning, for though no actual counter-reprisals were taken by the outside world, the result was to place the two dictator States in the position of pariahs and to present an absolutely clear moral issue before those States which are being attracted into their orbit, whether through fear and intimidation or through loss of faith in the democracies. We must not renounce our goal of Anglo-German understanding, but we must at the same time make it clear that there are limits not only to territorial concessions, but to the condonation of crime. There are many shades of attitude between complete silence in face of bestial outrage and public speeches of denunciation, such as Palmerston and Gladstone certainly, and Salisbury most probably, would have delivered. It is President Roosevelt and Messrs. Cordell Hull, Welles, and Ickes who are the present upholders of that tradition, not Mr. Chamberlain or Lord Halifax. This is even more the case since

President Roosevelt's New Year Message to Congress, in which he coupled 'the defence of religion, of democracy, and of good faith among the nations', and avoided the British official make-believe that Munich had assured world-peace. It is important to add that Mr. Chamberlain, in so promptly associating himself with the President's general views, and in summing up these views in the phrase 'freedom and peace', took a step for which no British Prime Minister provides any obvious precedent—and indeed what some would call the first really reassuring step since Munich.

There can be no question that what has led to this desirable, but all too belated approximation of ideas between the two great English-speaking nations, has been the adoption by the Reich, within a few weeks of the Munich settlement, of a far-reaching policy of Pogrom and extermination, and the proof which this affords that the Berlin Government, so far from aiming at 'appeasement', is more than ever wedded to methods of naked force at home and abroad. This is not the place for any detailed narrative; it will suffice to stress certain facts which have a very direct bearing upon the foreign policy which Britain is to pursue towards Germany. We must realize that the central conception on which the German State rests is no longer Law but Force, and that it is in the absolute control of a man of volcanic and abnormal temper, who has acquired that control because (at any rate since the War) there is something diseased and unbalanced in the psyche of the nation. If this be so, it would be madness on our part to contribute in any way to the material strengthening of the existing régime, and our sole hope of peaceful relations depends upon our being fully armed for our defence, and so closely allied with other Powers as to render

any attack upon us too great a risk. Paranoia is a most dangerous disease, for it combines abnormality with amazing flair and astuteness. While public argument rouses its victim to fury, constant yielding to him only increases his arrogance and appetite; those who deal with him must show urbanity and self-restraint, but also ceaseless vigilance and a firm demeanour.

The treatment meted out to the Jews of Germany and Austria—ranging from the burning of synagogues and looting of shops to the torture, plunder, and even murder of hundreds of entirely innocent individuals, merely because they belong to a particular race—is not a case of mob violence, but of an organized system planned by influential members of the Nazi Party, connived at by the State police, encouraged and gloated over by the official Press. A State responsible for such deliberate bestiality cannot be described as civilized; and its leaders, if they were less arrogant, and better psychologists, would not have been surprised at the violent reactions of public opinion which their misdeeds have evoked in Western Europe and in America. When the American President or one of his Cabinet speaks out with habitual American plainness of speech, the Nazi propagandists ascribe it to the undue influence of Jewish finance upon the White House (though it is notorious that Wall Street is the chief centre of opposition to President Roosevelt). It must be brought home to them that to world opinion this is no mere Jewish question, but that no country has the right to treat any human beings, or even animals, as Germany is at present treating the Jews. Moreover, the Pogroms have completely changed the attitude of British opinion towards the colonial question, and it is widely felt that until there is a change of

régime or a change of heart it would be impossible to hand over native populations towards which we have assumed obligations. There are, of course, many Germans who will dismiss this line of argument as a mere hypocritical excuse for not restoring Germany's former colonies, but they will do well to realize that to-day it is genuinely held by large sections of opinion which were till recently prepared to discuss colonial concessions. It would be most unwise for Germany to minimize this new temper, for the advocates of trusteeship for the African native and of all that this involves are a very vocal, enlightened, and influential section of British opinion.

This is only one of the directions in which the Pogroms have directly reacted upon foreign policy. There can be little doubt that they have done more than anything else to arouse American opinion to a sense of European realities, and to prepare the all-important psychological background against which even those most desirous of American isolation and neutrality will speedily realize its hopelessness in the event of a new European war. In a word, if two of the three great democracies 'shamefully purchased temporary immunity by the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia, the Jews may be the scapegoat whose sufferings are rousing the third great democracy to that close co-operation which can alone check the dictatorial menace.

One further material point should be mentioned in this context. 'Sweet reasonableness' has been much praised as a variant of 'appeasement', potent in its effects upon German and Italian opinion; but during the three months following Munich it became more apparent than ever that under the Dictators the masses had no influence whatsoever upon the shaping of policy, and that so far as the Governments were

concerned, sweet reason had about as much effect upon them as upon a man-eating tiger.

Neither this nor any other nation has ever won or held an Empire on the theory that nothing matters save the maintenance of peace. Let us seek peace and ensue it to the uttermost limits, but do not let us be afraid to declare, as patriotic Britons and as Christians, that there are certain moral issues for which it may at any moment be necessary to fight, and to stake the whole future of these islands. And again, do not let us foolishly shut our eyes to the harsh fact that without universal service neither the British Commonwealth, as a factor in the world, nor our liberties and standard of living inside these islands, can be permanently upheld in face of nations armed to the teeth and reduced to complete thralldom by militarized and centralized Governments which enjoy unrestricted powers. The Empire is in danger, and the eleventh hour has struck; if the situation is to be saved we must resign ourselves to the sacrifice of many things in our social, political, and economic structure that many of us have selfish reasons for preserving—knowing that the alternative is not to keep them, but to have them snatched rudely from us by more vigorous hands and to find no issue save an infinitely more drastic reconstruction of State and Constitution.

The main reason why recent appeals in favour of universal service have been greeted with so much reserve is not reluctance on the part of the rising generation to fulfil its duties in time of need, but the failure of our so-called leaders to make clear what it will be called upon to fight for. The much-debated phrase 'King and Country' may have sufficed for our grandfathers in the Crimea, but it is not enough for our sons. They

will not respond to appeals about Mediterranean trade-routes from men who have betrayed the cause of democracy in Czechoslovakia and Spain; but when they are given a clear lead and realize that the survival of free institutions is at stake, and are sure that the governing class is not compounding with the enemies of liberty, then there will be no lack of response.

And here we come to the most vital aspect of the whole situation. The ostensible leaders of civilization are driving the nations headlong, but at different paces, along a path which can only end in bankruptcy and general impoverishment. Unless they themselves call a halt (and already the pace is so breakneck that it may be doubted whether the greatest of autocrats could now stop it, even if he would), the only issue is through war, or revolution to forestall war. All the signs suggest that Europe is on the eve of another '1848', and its future will probably lie with the States which can avoid internal complications and preserve their essential institutions. In that hitherto unparalleled Year of Revolution the lead taken by Paris had a decisive influence in spreading the seeds of liberalism and democracy across the Continent. But the explosive character of the movement exhausted itself, and led to dangerous revulsions in more than one country, whereas the immunity from revolution or upheaval which Britain owed to a policy of gradual and timely reform, ushered in for this island a period of stability and prosperity so splendid as in the end to foster the dangerous belief that Progress is automatic, whereas in reality it can only be upheld by a fresh effort on the part of each succeeding generation. In Mr. Eden's words, sacrifice for all, the overhauling of our whole national economy, and vindication of 'the sanctity of contract' go hand in hand.



In the situation in which we now find ourselves, there are some, whose very natural desire to be last on the road to ruin impels them to adopt 'Peace at any Price' as their motto; they fail to realize that this only whets the appetites of the Bandit States and greatly increases the danger of a conflagration. But there still remains a middle course between surrender and aggression.

First, there must be a clear definition of aims and a warning of 'thus far and no farther'—no longer vaguely benevolent catchwords such as 'appeasement' and 'Peace with Honour'.

Second, there must be continued readiness for negotiation and concession, and even for a reform of the Genevan system of the League, but only in return for a general acceptance of some kind of world-order and of reduction of armaments. On the existing basis of 'the European Anarchy' it would be sheer folly to cede an inch.

Thirdly, there must be a really determined effort to rally what is left of a Democratic Front, not for offensive action, but as the sole means of checkmating rival designs of aggression and confronting their authors with that superior force which alone will make an 'impression'.

Fourthly, there must be action of a drastic and dramatic kind at home—compulsory universal service for man, woman, and child, a great extension of physical training for the youth, measures to check the decline of our merchant marine and our splendid seafaring class, a new agricultural policy planned as an essential factor in national defence, and a wholesale employment of the 'unemployed' in the solution of A.R.P. It may at first sight seem illogical to propound such measures as the best step towards disarmament

and peace; but any one acquainted with the psychology of foreign nations knows that nothing would make a more profound impression upon the dictatorships or do more to rally the wavering nations to the cause of liberty. And indeed with every month it is becoming more apparent, how closely the unemployment problem is linked up with foreign policy: for a state which cannot find work for its unemployed is at a grave disadvantage compared with a state which can, and will in the long run be discredited. It is absolutely essential that the Democracies should prove themselves no less capable than the Dictatorships of rooting out this canker of modern life which fills the younger generation with growing unrest.

In conclusion. The test to be applied to any settlement is threefold. It cannot be regarded as either tolerable or lasting if it ignores or overrides the small Powers and their interests, or again if it seeks to exclude any one of the Great Powers of Europe, or again, if it runs counter to American conceptions of liberty and democracy. Our alliance with France, once rooted in a comradeship of honour, has been riveted by a shameful bargain at the expense of a small Power which trusted us: it must be reframed on more honourable lines. We can thus set ourselves to build up healthy relations with America and with Russia, and with the many small nations which have always seen in our strength their best hope of salvation. This would give us the moral basis on which alone we can hope to enlist the younger generation and the working masses for a cause which will inevitably involve much sacrifice, effort, and readjustment. It would at the same time serve as the only effective deterrent upon the Dictators, by convincing them that the risk of fresh adventures would be excessive. It would automatically promote

that return to normality among the German people without which mutual relations must remain precarious.

But first and last and all the time we must make it clear that we stand for free institutions, that we shall if necessary fight to uphold them at home, and that while we do not presume to impose them upon other nations, we are by no means indifferent to attacks upon them elsewhere and recognize a natural affinity, transcending race and not bounded by religion, with all peoples struggling for liberty. 'Peace and Freedom' is not a mere catchword; the one is a corollary of the other.

NONDUM EST FINIS

## CHAPTER V

### FROM MUNICH TO PRAGUE

#### *False Optimism*

AT a largely attended meeting last November for the discussion of the foreign situation, I heard a distinguished supporter of the Government, who had himself held minor office, boldly declare that he regarded the Munich settlement 'not merely with complacency, but with pride'; and as late as 29 January at Birmingham the Prime Minister was still declaring: 'I see nothing to regret. Munich was only an incident in a consistent, unwavering policy of peace.' Less than two months later the policy of appeasement lay in ruins, and even the Government's most ardent apologists had been driven to accept a reversal of foreign policy more drastic than anything recorded in our modern history. It is not so long ago that many were boggling over the new departure involved in the military commitments to France; but now, with breakneck pace, we have been swept into a whole series of guarantees towards countries in Eastern Europe which have at their disposal far fewer resources for defence than had the Czechoslovak Republic before its partition.

Nothing shows more clearly than this matter of guarantees the utter lack of foresight shown by His Majesty's Government. In the great Munich debate the Prime Minister expressed the hope that 'under the new system of guarantees the new Czechoslovakia will find a greater security than she has ever known in the past', and in his closing speech he described the charge of betrayal as 'preposterous', adding that 'what we did was to save her from annihilation and give her a chance

of new life as a new State, which involves the loss of territory and fortifications, but may perhaps enable her to enjoy in the future a national existence under a neutrality and security comparable to that which we see in Switzerland to-day'. Sir Samuel Hoare went even further than his chief, and argued that the new State need not be weaker than the old, and that the new guarantee 'will more than compensate for the loss of a strategic frontier'. Meanwhile Lord Stanhope, in the House of Lords, produced an argument which reads even more grimly to-day. Hitler, he said, wanted a military frontier cutting off 'Czechoslovakia from the Slovak districts', and thus 'had it not been for the Prime Minister and the arrangements he made, Czechoslovakia would have ceased to exist'. This is exactly what has actually happened, as the logical result of Munich.

Mr. Chamberlain, it is true, hastened to welcome the grave warning conveyed by President Roosevelt in his New Year's message.<sup>1</sup> But otherwise he continued resolutely on the path of false optimism and, turning a deaf ear to the campaign of studied insult and abuse launched against France in the Italian official Press, he not merely paid his official visit to Rome early in January, and reaffirmed his faith in Anglo-Italian friendship, but went out of his way to express his complete confidence in the plighted word of the Duce. Soon after his return the Home Secretary again took up the tale of optimism, denouncing the 'jitterbugs' of Britain as a public nuisance, describing the Prime Minister as 'the lifebuoy of Europe', and declaring

<sup>1</sup> 'As yet another indication of the vital role of the American democracy in world affairs and its devotion to the ideal of ordered human progress' By way of contrast Marshal Goring's organ, the *Essener National Zeitung*, said that the message 'might almost be pronounced to be provocation of a rupture of diplomatic relations'.

that 'this great country can never be defeated', and that its economic strength was 'one of the greatest lines of defence'<sup>1</sup> (27 January at Cardiff).

The Führer's Reichstag speech three days later, with its aggressive and detailed distortion of historical facts, so far from justifying this facile optimism, showed more clearly than ever that there was no common basis of ideas between the Axis and the democracies. Yet the Government Press was encouraged to lay the main stress upon a single phrase of Hitler's—the hope of a long peace—which, there is reason to believe, was inserted at the last moment and which certainly did not fit in with the general tone of the speech, except perhaps as showing that the democracies were expected to achieve a long peace by a fresh series of abject surrenders. The Prime Minister himself took the view that the speech was 'not that of a man preparing to throw Europe into a fresh crisis'. Lord Halifax, alone among those exercising control of policy, showed perception of the impending danger. In his speech at Hull (3 February), he admitted the growing 'clash of philosophies', faced up to the deterioration in Italo-French relations, and for the first time—very urbanely, but none the less firmly—contradicted one of the many glaring misconceptions which our statesmen have so long permitted the Führer to put about without contradiction. In this particular case he denied the absurd contention that the Great War had been waged to exclude Germany from World Trade: in reality Germany and Britain were each other's best customers, and increased mutual trade was more than ever desirable.

<sup>1</sup> The most effective answer came from Mr. Scott MacCurdy, who in a short letter to *The Times* quoted the retort of the American landlady to her lodger's complaint about jitterbugs 'There were none in the house, it was the grumbler who had brought them with him.

(It might even have been added that the diminution in that trade was one of the major causes of British unemployment.)

Three weeks later there was a further stiffening of tone, when he told the House of Lords of our complete solidarity with France, of our absolutely peaceful intentions, of our condemnation of war as an instrument of policy, but warned against the illusion of treating this mood ‘as a proof of weakness or cowardice’, and summed up Britain’s general attitude as that of the traffic sign, ‘Halt! major road ahead’. Mr. Chamberlain’s Blackburn speech on the same day was much more uneven in quality: on the one hand he quoted the Shakespearean tag, ‘Come the three corners of the world in arms, and we shall shock them’; on the other he treated Hitler’s passing phrase about peace as having ‘eased the international tension’, and committed himself to the view that this and the prospect of an ending of the Spanish War would enable trade ‘to develop in 1939, unhampered by political anxieties’. There was, he said, already ‘a gleam of light in the direction of increased trade’.

This optimism—so well calculated to counteract recruiting efforts and to leave the canker of unemployment unchecked—continued while General Franco, as conqueror of Barcelona, was receiving unconditional recognition from the Powers, and insisting upon absolute surrender from the Republican Government, now in full dissolution.

On Thursday, 9 March, a statement was given to representative Pressmen from a high authority in Downing Street, to the effect that the Italo-French dispute was on the point of adjustment, that the trade negotiations which were about to open with Germany were likely to produce admirable results, and that there

was good hope of a new Disarmament Conference being held by the end of 1939.<sup>1</sup> The very next day Sir Samuel Hoare, speaking at Chelsea, raised the hopes of his audience by arguing that once expenditure on armaments could be abolished, 'the almost incredible inventions and discoveries of the time' might be devoted to 'the creation of a Golden Age in which poverty would be reduced to insignificance and the standard of living raised to heights never before attained. . . . Five men in Europe, the three Dictators and the Prime Ministers of Britain and France, if they worked with a singleness of purpose and a unity of action to this end might in an incredibly short space of time transform the whole history of the world. These five men, working together and blessed by the President of the United States, would make themselves eternal benefactors of the human race. Our own Prime Minister has shown his determination to work heart and soul to such an end. I cannot believe that other leaders of Europe will not join him in the high endeavour on which he is engaged.'

Meanwhile, throughout that week *The Times* had been publishing a series of letters intended to show the success of a policy of appeasement. Even as late as Monday, 13 March—when the crisis was already upon us—*The Times*, in its desire to defend the Prime Minister against the criticisms of Professor Gilbert Murray, committed itself to the following amazing sentiments, which deserve to remain permanently on record:

'They [British aims] remain in 1939 what they

<sup>1</sup> The recipients of this message loyally refrained from any indication of its source: but some of the American journalists, to whom a similar communication was made without an equivalent pledge of secrecy, reported it to their papers as having come from the Prime Minister himself



were in 1938. Now, as then, there is readiness to confer and to co-operate with any country, under whatever Government, which is prepared to enter negotiations in a spirit of reciprocity. . . . If anything distinguishes this year from its predecessor, it is the knowledge that Germany has completed those demands upon her neighbours which, by their own professions they were unable conscientiously to contest, and yet had failed to satisfy while the way of orderly settlement was still open.’<sup>1</sup>

The exact circumstances under which such dope was administered to the British Press, still remain obscure. There are many in Fleet Street who maintain that the initiative came from the Prime Minister himself and his Secretariat. Certain it is that it did not come from the Foreign Office, which was not consulted, and had no such illusions; and that the three fighting service Ministries were nonplussed and annoyed at the dissemination of views directly contrary to all their own inside information. The news of Hitler’s intention to strike a lightning *coup* before 15 March against Czechoslovakia in its mutilated and wellnigh defenceless state, reached Paris not later than Tuesday, 7 March, and was communicated on Wednesday to the proper quarters in London, which also received detailed information as to the concentration of German troops in Silesia, and on the Bavarian and Austrian frontiers. Yet on the Thursday Downing Street was engaged in lulling

<sup>1</sup> This, if it means anything, means that four days before the annexation of Czechoslovakia, the leading Press exponent of Mr. Chamberlain and his policy was still trying to justify the Munich ‘settlement’ on the ground that it only imposed terms which Czechoslovakia might have, and ought to have, satisfied earlier. And we shall see that even the events of 15 March did not suffice to bring *The Times* to its senses.

the Press to sleep, and on the Friday the Home Secretary—one of the 'inner Cabinet' and of the Committee concerned with foreign affairs—was talking of a Golden Age. It is impossible to escape from one of two conclusions: either confidential information of the highest importance, in the possession of our diplomatic and military authorities, had, for some unexplained reason, not reached the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary, or—still more inexplicable—it had reached them and been disregarded. Small wonder that Mr. Winston Churchill—in the course of the debate of 13 April—should have put the hypothetical question: 'Whether there is not some hand which intervenes and which filters down or withholds intelligence from Ministers.'

### *The Crisis in Slovakia*

These facts form the background against which the events of March and April stand out in high relief and illustrate the pathetic delusions of those in whose hands the destinies of the British Commonwealth lie. It is now necessary to consider as briefly as possible the events themselves.

Since the New Year there had been an ominous silence in Prague: the pressure from Berlin was steadily growing, periodic speeches from President Hacha and the Agrarian Premier Mr. Beran emphasized the need for closest co-operation with Berlin and recognized the country's changed status since Munich, and all the time behind the scenes there was a plaintive passive resistance, compounded of a knowledge of helplessness and a desire to postpone the inevitable as long as possible. Among the many results of Munich had been the sudden and arbitrary reconstruction of political life, the parties of the Left having been liquidated with

varying degrees of compulsion and the remainder having been formed into two groups, sufficiently disciplined to co-operate with one another and to realize that any other tactics would precipitate German intervention. Already by Christmas it was notorious that the feelings of anger against Beneš, which undoubtedly existed at the height of the crisis, had again died down, and that free elections would give him at the very least an 80 per cent majority in Bohemia, Moravia and Ruthenia, and a great deal more support in Slovakia than the new totalitarian Hlinkaist Government cared to contemplate. But it was recognized on all sides that Parliament must for the present remain in abeyance, that only the Right Wing of the Agrarians and Clericals had any chance of holding Germany at bay, and also that it was patriotic enough to deserve the support of the adherents of the fallen régime. Meanwhile there was nothing for it but to submit to a virtual *Gleichschaltung* of the Press and of the radio, and to accept anti-Semitic measures such as in no way corresponded to Czech sentiment.<sup>1</sup>

The most radical change wrought by Munich was, however, the transformation of the Republic into a Federal State, consisting of three units, Bohemia-Moravia, Slovakia and Ruthenia respectively. In Slovakia the failure of the Beneš-Hodža policy had resulted in the instant elimination of all the old parties which stood for active co-operation with Prague, and in the concentration of power in the hands of the Autonomist Party, which, though polling more than any other single party, had never had more than 30 per cent of the Slovak people behind it. Its veteran leader,

<sup>1</sup> Even the official *Prager Presse* ceased publication at the end of the year, and soon after the two oldest independent German papers, *Prager Tagblatt* and *Bobemia*.

Monsignor Hlinka, a man of fiery eloquence and strong national feeling but vain, personal, lacking in judgment, easily swayed by artful party wirepullers and entirely unacquainted with political currents in Europe, had died in August 1938. His ardent, if narrow, devotion to the Catholic Church had on many occasions caused no slight embarrassment to the Holy See and to successive Nuncios in Prague. In Rome he was felt to have amply proved the dictum of an arbiter appointed in pre-War days to investigate his quarrel with Bishop Parvy, to the effect that he was '*sacerdos turbulens*'; and it was for this reason that he never attained higher rank in the Church than titular Apostolic Notary. His was not a leadership which encouraged the rise of younger men of real talent, and his successor, Father Tiso, though he proved an efficient Minister of Social Welfare during the two years in which the Hlinka Party formed part of the Coalition Government in Prague, could not be described as an outstanding figure, and was surrounded by untried mediocrities. At the beginning of October 1938 these men swept aside the many eminent Slovaks in whose hands the administration of Slovakia had hitherto lain, and presented a virtual ultimatum to the re-constituted Government of Prague. They thus obtained an autonomy reaching far beyond the most extreme demands of Hlinka—a separate Diet and Cabinet in Bratislava, *Gleichschaltung* of all other parties, wholesale dismissal of all Czech officials and teachers (quite regardless of whether there were any properly qualified Slovaks to take their places), anti-Semite measures and the establishment of the 'Hlinka Guard'—a bad and undisciplined version of the Nazi 'S.A.'

The amateur and irresponsible behaviour of the new

rulers of Slovakia was nowhere more apparent than in the sphere of finance and in foreign policy. A boundless appetite for well-paid jobs, old or new, speedily depleted the provincial treasury, hitherto conducted on lines of strict economy. The assumption that the Czechs could, by the threat of secession, be jockeyed into financing experiments over which they had no control, led the Slovak leader to coquet with neighbouring States—Hungary, Poland, and above all Germany—without the slightest regard for the existence of a Foreign Office in Prague, to whose exclusive sphere foreign affairs belonged under the revised constitution which they themselves had forced the Czechs to accept. Turbulence and inexperience were rampant throughout Slovakia, and this admirably suited the game of the Reich, which almost from the first day after Munich had been maturing its plans for a further extension of its stranglehold.

On 9 March the Slovak Separatist movement came rapidly to a head, the Slovak Ministers refusing to make a public declaration of loyalty to the Republic, but none the less demanding from the Central Government a loan to replenish their empty coffers, a separate Slovak army and separate diplomatic representation abroad. Finding that Czech forbearance was at an end and that there was no chance of wresting from Prague concessions equivalent to making a large hole at the bottom of a sack of coins, they were planning the proclamation of Slovak independence, when President Hacha intervened, dismissed Father Tiso and most of his Cabinet and sent troops to disarm the Hlinka Guard and hold the Government offices in Bratislava and other towns. It has since transpired that Hacha, true to his policy of co-operation with Germany, had consulted the Wilhelmstrasse before taking action and

had been duly encouraged, but that at the same time German support was being secretly promised to the Separatists in return for their acceptance of a Customs Union and the adoption of German currency. Mr. Durčansky, perhaps the most extreme member of the Tiso Cabinet, fled to Vienna, and with the direct assistance of the Nazi Governor of Austria, Herr von Seyss-Inquart and of Dr. Goebbels, began a series of violent and abusive broadcasts against Prague and in favour of independence. For a couple of days it seemed as though Prague would patch up a settlement with Mr. Sidor, a leading Slovak journalist, known as the right-hand man first of Hlinka, then of Tiso: he accepted the Premiership, exercised a moderating influence on the Hlinka Guard and pledged himself to liberate political prisoners. But this appeasement did not suit the book of the Germans, who distrusted Sidor, owing to his strongly Polish proclivities. They therefore encouraged the dispossessed Tiso to escape from the Jesuit seminary where he was under police supervision, and to fly to Berlin, where he was received first by Herr von Ribbentrop and then by the Führer himself. A fresh German Press campaign was now launched against Czechoslovakia, which was accused of the same 'arbitrary acts as under Beneš'.<sup>1</sup> Tiso's dismissal was treated in Berlin as illegal, though it was in full accordance with the President's powers as conferred on him by the new federal constitution under which Tiso held office. On the Vienna wireless Durčansky was allowed to denounce his late colleague Sidor as a traitor, and to preach Slovak reliance upon Hitler. Tiso flew back to Bratislava with the unreserved backing of the Reich Government, drove the

<sup>1</sup> *Essener Nationalzeitung*, 12 March. The *Hamburger Nachrichten* wrote of 'an orgy of Hussite insolence'

chastened Sidor from office, summoned his packed Slovak Diet and obtained from it an unanimous declaration of independence (14 March). He reconstructed the Cabinet, the portfolio of Foreign Affairs was assigned to Durčansky, as the most advanced exponent of a Germanophil policy abroad, and of National Socialist principles and methods at home: while as Vice-Premier he appointed Professor Tuka, a former confidant of Hlinka who had been tried and condemned for treason to the Czechoslovak Republic in 1929. Durčansky hastened to send an adulatory telegram in the name of 'the Slovak people to the great Fuhrer', and within twenty-four hours of the declaration of independence Tiso, in the name of his Government, placed the new State 'under the protection of the Great German Reich'—an offer which was accepted in a curt telegram of the following day,<sup>1</sup> when German troops marched into Bratislava—presumably by Tiso's invitation. Thus the last pretence of German non-interference in the affairs of the Republic was ruthlessly swept aside, and a second and final partition was put in operation.

### *The Collapse of Ruthenia*

The action of the Slovaks left the third federal unit, Ruthenia, completely in the air and cut off from all possibility of assistance from Bohemia. The phantom Government of Hust, under Monsignor Vološin, thus had no choice save to follow the Slovak example or to disappear altogether: it therefore proclaimed the independence of Ruthenia and appealed in its turn to the Fuhrer for help. But though Germany had turned the scale in favour of 'Carpatho-Ukraine's' survival during

<sup>1</sup> 'I acknowledge receipt of your telegram of yesterday and herewith take over the problems of the Slovak State.'

the arbitration discussions of Vienna, no help was forthcoming this time, and the tiny Ruthene State was the sop which Berlin found it expedient to fling to the wolves of Warsaw and Budapest, thereby ensuring their inaction while bigger events were pending. At 3 p.m. on Tuesday the 14th the Hungarian Government presented an ultimatum to Prague, recognizing Slovakia's new status, but demanding the withdrawal of all Czech troops from Ruthenia within twenty-four hours, and fixing a time limit of twelve hours for reply. Helpless in the German vice, Prague had no choice but to submit. Meanwhile Hungary did not even deign to address an ultimatum to the luckless Ruthenes themselves, but simply invaded their territory, pressing northwards to the Polish frontier, with the object of driving all who dared to resist into the mountainous triangle near the sources of the River Tisza. The Government collapsed, Monsignor Vološin and his colleagues took refuge on Roumanian soil, but irregular Ukrainian free corps put up a strong resistance in the mountains and suffered heavy casualties. The advancing Hungarians gave no quarter to the members of the 'Sič', and over 100 Ukrainians, including several officials from the immediate entourage of the late Premier, were summarily executed in a courtyard behind the Hotel Koruna at Hust.

Ruthenia owed its rapid extinction to a combination of motives on the part of its neighbours. The Czechs were powerless to help in the face of the direct German menace to their own existence. The Slovaks were glad to purchase immunity from Hungarian attack by refraining from any attempt to preserve the link between themselves and the Ruthenes. The Germans, realizing that the frontiers which, under Italian pressure, they had assigned to Ruthenia by the Vienna



Award, were really untenable, saw a good opportunity for liquidating the experiment and at the same time distracting the attention of the Magyars while they themselves established control of Slovakia and made the Czechs finally innocuous.<sup>1</sup> The Poles had viewed with anxiety the formation of a free Ukrainian State which, however small and primitive, was bound to exercise an influence upon their own enslaved Ukrainian minority of 6 millions; now, rather than transfer the process of fermentation to within the boundaries of the Polish State, they preferred that it should revert to its former master Hungary, who had kept the Ukrainians consistently in an even more backward, and therefore politically less dangerous, condition than their other neglected racial minorities. Finally, the Roumanians, to whom, so long as Czechoslovakia existed, Ruthenia had performed the vital function of a corridor linking Bucarest with Prague, now on the contrary had a certain strategic motive in allowing Poland and Hungary to acquire a common frontier and thereby interpose a territorial barrier between Roumania and Germany. Moreover, the need for placating their Polish ally (in the period following Munich Bucarest had flatly opposed Colonel Beck's action in favour of substituting a Polish-Hungarian for a Czechoslovak-Roumanian frontier) outweighed their very natural misgivings at the further aggrandisement of Hungary, at the expense of their ally. Roumania therefore rejected the appeal of the dying Ruthenian Government, begging to be admitted to a sort of

<sup>1</sup> Already on 14 March an official German statement was transmitted from Berlin to Budapest, declaring that 'Ruthenia interested Germany only in so far as she was a member of the Vienna Arbitration Court. As Czecho-Slovakia has ceased to exist, the Vienna Award is already regarded merely as a historical document, and hence it is the exclusive concern of Hungary how she settles up with Ruthenia. This question has become a Hungarian one.'

Anschluss on federal lines, and she also declined the suggestion of Hungary and Poland that she should join them in partition. Her position was still more clearly defined by the new Roumanian Premier, M. Calinescu, who publicly stated that she desired no further territory inhabited by other races, but that as Czechoslovakia had ceased to exist, Roumania wished to show her good will towards Poland and also towards Hungary, by adopting a neutral attitude towards the latter's seizure of Ruthenia. Roumania, it should be said in passing, is the only Power, with the possible exception of Russia, whose attitude towards the Czech tragedy was correct throughout: and indeed it is in striking contrast to the time-serving attitude adopted by the Stojadinović Government, in the teeth of Yugoslav popular sympathy with Prague.

The treatment meted out to Ruthenia was yet another proof, if proof were still needed, that all idea of a settlement on a racial basis had been abandoned, and that strategy took precedence of 'self-determination'. There was never even the faintest pretence of consulting the wishes of the population concerned, and this for the obvious reason that the great majority of the Ukrainians detested the very idea of reunion with Hungary, and asked nothing better than to maintain the connexion with Prague which had brought them unexampled material and moral advantages during the past twenty years, in the building of new houses, schools, churches and public offices, in hygiene and communications, and indeed in every sphere of life. It is not yet sufficiently realized that the transformation wrought in this little country since 1919 is one of the most remarkable, and successful, political experiments in Europe since the War, and that a new generation, trained in their own schools and nationally conscious,

was growing up and beginning to take its share in the administration. To them Hungary stood for centuries of neglect and exploitation, crowned by systematic attempts at Magyarization in the generation preceding the War: and it can scarcely be doubted that if they had been allowed a free choice between union with Bohemia, Poland, Roumania or Hungary, their vote would have expressed itself in that order, and that, little as they have reason to love the Poles, as the oppressors of their Galician kinsmen, they would sooner share the captivity of the latter under a Slav yoke than be subjected once more to a completely alien rule.

### *Hitler Seizes Prague*

It was necessary to begin our survey with these events in Slovakia and Ruthenia, because, though seemingly local in character, they provide the key to German policy and tactics in the Danubian area. Slovakia was to be used as an instrument for the disruption of the Czechoslovak Republic, Ruthenia as a bait to win over Hungary. Hungary in her turn was to be used against Roumania: and Poland to be isolated in the north, while Roumanian resources were to be used as an instrument of German aggression against the Ukraine. 'Self-determination' or racial affinities could now safely be relegated to the background, strategy and the rule of force became the dominant factors.

While Tiso was flying to Berlin and conferring with Hitler and Ribbentrop, an ultimatum was sent to the Prague Cabinet, warning it to desist from all interference in Slovakia and Ruthenia, and the German troops which had for weeks past been steadily concentrating in Bavaria, Austria and Silesia, now rapidly

converged upon the frontiers of the torso Czechoslovak State.<sup>1</sup> At the same time a new campaign of boundless calumny was launched upon the German wireless, with the purpose of convincing the German public that there was a 'Czech Terror' in Bohemia, that 'Communist bands' were endangering the lives of every German in the Republic, that thousands of Germans were flying towards the frontier and that 'the furnace of unrest must be stamped out', in other words, Czech independence annihilated. Needless to say, these stories were complete fabrications, and it is on record that a day later German troops were utterly puzzled to find exemplary order in every town which they entered. Where are the dead and wounded, they asked?

Faced with such a situation, President Hacha and his Foreign Minister Dr. Chvalkovsky decided to hasten to Berlin, in the faint hope of inducing the Führer to refrain from irrevocable decisions. They arrived there an hour before midnight on Tuesday the 14th, but while they were still in the train, the first invasion had already taken place, and German troops occupied the Moravian capital Brno from the south and the industrial district of Moravska Ostrava from the north, so suddenly and so swiftly as to make resistance virtually impossible. By nine on the morning of Wednesday the mechanized forces of General Blaskowitz had actually occupied Prague itself.

The full story of what passed between the unhappy Czech delegates and their conquerors cannot yet be published, but enough is known to provide a strange

<sup>1</sup> The relevant facts were well known to the Intelligence services of the West, and to many foreign journalists (cf. various telegrams in the *Daily Telegraph* of 14 March), but not to the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, who scouted the idea of impending danger.

parallel to the treatment of Herr von Schuschnigg at Berchtesgaden a year earlier. The decisive conversations between Hitler and Hacha began at 1.10 a.m. and at 3.55 a document of abject surrender was signed—only, it is alleged, after a revolver had been placed within reach of the President and he had been warned that refusal to sign would involve immediate orders to bombard Prague. The Czechs had come prepared to accept most drastic terms, including a military alliance, a common foreign policy, a customs and currency union and the introduction of anti-Semitic laws: but what was actually demanded went far beyond this. In monstrous mockery of the basic facts, it was jointly declared that 'the aim of all efforts must be the securing of quiet, order and peace in this part of central Europe'. President Hacha therefore, 'in order to reach a final appeasement'—a word well worthy of the occasion—'placed the fate of the Czech people trustingly in the hands of the Führer', and the Führer in his turn 'placed them under the protection of the German Reich and would guarantee them an autonomous development of their national life, corresponding to their peculiarities'. There followed three proclamations in the Führer's name, fittingly read out by Dr. Goebbels himself. The first alluded to 'the intolerable terrorist régime' in Czechoslovakia and especially 'in the populous German linguistic islands which the generosity of Germany had left within Czechoslovakia', and then announced that he had 'decided to permit to-day' the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia by German troops, which would 'disarm the terrorist bands' and protect the population. The second, describing Czechoslovakia as 'in dissolution', enjoined good behaviour on the troops, who were to enter as 'representatives of Greater Germany', with the

task of 'creating an enduring order'. The third stated that the Prague Government had forbidden any resistance. The Führer wasted no time, but himself went straight to Prague, accompanied by Herr Himmler and legions of secret police, and spent the Wednesday night in the famous Castle where Masaryk and Beneš had for twenty years replaced the Habsburgs. With one fell swoop the remains of Czechoslovakia were partitioned into three, Ruthenia being flung to its secular enemy, Slovakia remaining nominally independent, while Bohemia and Moravia were incorporated in the Reich. Baron Neurath, the former Foreign Minister, was appointed to the office of 'Protector', and insult was added to injury by the choice of the Sudeten irredentist leaders Henlein and Frank and the Gauleiter of Austria, Bürckel, as his assistants.

### *The End of the Policy of 'Appeasement'*

These events administered a profound shock to world opinion, and the anxiety evoked even among the advocates of 'appeasement' was reflected in the questions addressed to the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on 14 March. None the less, that afternoon—as it was to prove, within fifteen hours of the German entry into Prague, and only four days after the distribution of official dope—Mr. Chamberlain not only took up an entirely evasive attitude on the matter of a guarantee to Czechoslovakia,<sup>1</sup> but reminded the Leader

<sup>1</sup> Mr Attlee asked, 'Is it not clear that influences are being brought to bear to separate Slovakia from the rest of Czechoslovakia, and is not this Government bound by its guarantee under the Munich Agreement to have a very close interest in anything which concerns the integrity of the Czechoslovak State?' To which the Prime Minister replied, 'Without full information I would not like to express an opinion upon the first point in the right honourable gentleman's question. Assuming it to be true, that would not be a ground for bringing into force the guarantee.'

of the Opposition 'that the proposed guarantee was one against unprovoked aggression against Czechoslovakia. *No such aggression has yet taken place*'. Lord Halifax, speaking in the House of Lords on the 15th, showed more comprehension for what was happening, but also took the line that no real guarantee had ever been given to Czechoslovakia, and argued that 'the situation was radically altered' by the Slovak declaration of independence, whose effect was 'the internal disruption of the State whose frontiers *we had proposed to guarantee*'. The Government, he said, had always regarded as 'only of a transitory nature' the state of affairs described by Sir Thomas Inskip in the House of Commons,<sup>1</sup> and accordingly 'could not hold itself any longer bound by those obligations'. In other words, the guarantee of which so much had been made by official spokesmen during the Munich crisis, as a sop to outraged opinion, had never been a reality, or intended seriously. We now had the most practical of all proofs that at Munich Czechoslovakia had been abandoned to her fate, with merely a pious hope that she might escape it.

On other points, however, Lord Halifax struck a firmer note. He first made the announcement—all the more effective for its extreme baldness—that the Government had decided to call off the impending visit of the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of the Department of Overseas Trade to Berlin, as 'inappropriate' at the present juncture. He then declared what had happened to be 'inconsistent with the spirit of the Munich Agreement': for though it had laid down the new frontiers of Czechoslovakia by common agreement of the four Powers, those frontiers had now been overrun by Germany without

<sup>1</sup> See *supra*, p. 115.

any consultation of the other three. Moreover, the Germans had now abandoned the policy of only incorporating population of German race and were invading 'territory inhabited by people with whom they had no racial connexion'. These events were bound to be 'a cause of disturbance' and 'a shock to confidence'. Even greater understatements were made in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister, who was in the first instance concerned to reaffirm that the course taken at Munich was right and 'had received the approval of the vast majority of world opinion'. None the less he had to admit that the settlement had not proved final, that 'the State which after that settlement we hoped would begin a new and stable career, had become disintegrated', and that his suggestion that 'others should now make their contribution towards peace' had met with no response. But though he must 'bitterly regret what has now occurred', we must not be 'deflected from our course, but must continue to aim at substituting the method of discussion for the method of force in the settlement of differences'. As in September, so in March—not a word of sympathy for a nation that had lost its independence, much less any admission that its submission to our pressure had contributed to the catastrophe and had been due to reliance on a guarantee which he was now showing to be worthless: first and foremost a desire to be proved right, and annoyance at Hitler's lack of response to his personal approach.

Fortunately for the national credit this attitude was immediately felt both by Parliament and by the country to be totally inadequate to the situation. The *Manchester Guardian* wrote very aptly of Mr. Chamberlain's 'freezing gift of understatement'. The *Daily Telegraph* once more took the lead which *The Times*



had thrown away, and wrote: 'By this act Germany has made herself guilty of the most flagrant and impudent act of unprovoked aggression which has been witnessed in Europe in modern times.' In the House Mr. Grenfell, speaking for Labour, demanded 'a gesture for peace to all the nations of the world, and an equally firm gesture that we stand by all those who stand to defend liberty and freedom'. Sir Archibald Sinclair expressed indignation at Britain's 'humiliating position' in face of deliberate aggression, and wondered how the Government could have failed to realize German military preparations for invasion and who was responsible for the soporifics which they had administered? Above all, Mr. Eden, after associating himself with the words of the *Daily Telegraph* quoted above, contended that all the hopes entertained at Munich had been 'falsified', and that 'if these present methods in Europe are allowed to continue unchecked, we are heading straight for anarchy and an universal tragedy which is going to engulf us all'.

Meanwhile the temper of the country was rapidly rising, and it is no secret that a section of the Cabinet, already gravely perturbed by the indifference of the Prime Minister, now pressed for a firmer note. This explains the marked change which was noticeable in Mr. Chamberlain's speech at Birmingham on 17 March. He began by saying that 'public opinion in the world has received a sharper shock than has ever yet been administered to it, even by the present régime in Germany': and he actually admitted that 'European appeasement' was 'not a very happy term or one which accurately describes the purpose' of his own policy. Its success depended on no Power seeking to obtain 'a general domination of Europe': and (he was naïve enough to add) 'the results' obtained at Munich 'were

not altogether satisfactory'. For Hitler had assured him at Berchtesgaden that the union of the Sudetenland with Germany 'was the last of his territorial ambitions in Europe, and that he had no wish to include in the Reich people of other races than German'. In his Sport Palace speech of 27 September Hitler had again said, 'This is the last territorial claim I have to make in Europe', and later in the same speech had added, 'I have assured Mr. Chamberlain, and I emphasize it now, that when this problem is solved, Germany has no more territorial problems in Europe. . . . I shall not be interested in the Czech State any more, and I can guarantee it. We don't want any Czechs any more.' He had, moreover, put his signature at Munich to a document which guaranteed 'the *final* determination of the frontiers' by the International Commission and the settlement of any other outstanding question between Germany and Britain 'by the method of consultation'.

To-day, the Prime Minister went on, he shared the disappointment and indignation of 'the great majority of the British people' at the way in which Hitler had 'taken the law into his own hands', seized Prague 'before even the Czech President was received and confronted with demands which he had no power to resist', and annexed Bohemia and Moravia to the German Reich. 'Every one who remembers the fate of the Jews and of political prisoners in Austria must be filled with distress and foreboding', and here for the first time in the whole history of the Czech crisis his indignation drew from him a phrase of sympathy for 'the proud and brave people who have been so suddenly subjected to this invasion, whose liberties are curtailed, whose national independence has gone'. And he very rightly brushed aside the flimsy plea that invasion had

been 'rendered inevitable by disorders which threatened the peace and security of her mighty neighbour. If there were disorders, were they not fomented from without? And can anybody outside Germany take seriously the idea that they could be a danger to that great country, that they could provide any justification for what had happened?'

These considerations led with admirable logic to a series of searching questions which range over the whole political gamut of the day. (1) 'If it is easy to discover good reasons for ignoring assurances so solemnly and repeatedly given, what reliance can be placed on any other assurances from the same source?' (2) 'The present régime in Germany had sprung upon the world a series of surprises which had shocked and affronted opinion, but in each case—the Rhineland, the Anschluss, the Sudetenland—'there was something to be said on the grounds of racial affinity or of just claims too long resisted for the necessity of the change'. Was this latest surprise 'the end of an old adventure, or the beginning of a new'? Is it the last attack on a small State, or is it to be followed by others? (3) And from this there followed a third question—'Is this in fact a step in the direction of an attempt to dominate the world by force?'—an aim which, in another speech at Birmingham only six weeks earlier he had defined as 'a demand which the democracies should resist'. While still reluctant to draw such a conclusion, or to enter upon 'new and unspecified commitments', and feeling that war was 'a senseless and cruel thing', he made it clear that 'such a challenge, if ever it were made', would be resisted by this country 'to the utmost of its power': and without as yet answering his own questions, he faced up to the necessity for Britain, her partners and allies, and in particular Germany's neighbours,

'all reviewing the position with that sense of responsibility which its gravity demands'.

In all this there was a new note which for the first time seemed to align the Premier with the leaders of world democracy. Of altogether exceptional significance was the statement issued by Mr. Sumner Welles<sup>1</sup> at Washington, with the express approval of President Roosevelt. 'This Government,' he said, 'founded upon and dedicated to the principles of human liberty and democracy, cannot refrain from making known this country's condemnation of acts which have resulted in the temporary<sup>2</sup> extinguishment of the liberties of a free and independent people, with whom . . . the people of the United States have maintained especially close and friendly relations.' 'The position of the Government of the United States has been made consistently clear. It has emphasized the need for respect for the sanctity of treaties and of the plighted word, and for non-intervention of any nation in the domestic affairs of other nations, and it has on repeated occasions expressed its condemnation of a policy of military aggression. It is manifest that acts of wanton lawlessness and of arbitrary force are threatening the very structure of modern civilization.'

The speech of Lord Halifax in the House of Lords on 20 March went one stage further, arguing that recent events 'required the British Government and every free people to *rethink their attitude*'. What he said provided ample evidence of 'rethinking' on his own part: it was indeed the sternest pronouncement from any British statesman since Mr. Chamberlain had assumed control of foreign policy in February 1938.

<sup>1</sup> Acting Secretary of State, in the absence of Mr. Cordell Hull.

<sup>2</sup> It was very widely asserted and believed in Washington that the word 'temporary' was specially inserted by the President himself.

He opened with a brief historical survey intended to show that the Slovak extremists had acted in collusion with the Reich and that the German minority inside Bohemia, which enjoyed a position of 'exceptional privilege', had adopted the same aggressive tactics as in September last. He stopped to deny disagreement between himself and the Prime Minister and confess their 'acute consciousness of the difference between beliefs and hopes', and then accused Hitler of being 'untrue to his own philosophy' and of violating the principle of self-determination by his subjection of 8 million Czechs, of encouraging separatism 'in the material interests of Germany', and of using German minorities outside the Reich 'as a pretext for intervention'. Germany had made 'more than one new departure in the field of international technique—wars without declaration of war, pressure exercised under threat of immediate resort to force, intervention in the internal struggle of other States. Countries are now faced with the encouragement of separatism, not in the interests of separatists or minority elements, but in the imperial interests of Germany.' 'We are confronted with the arbitrary suppression of an independent sovereign State by armed forces, and by violation of what I must regard as the elementary rules of international conduct.' Are we to conclude that 'German policy is now to be directed towards domination over non-German peoples'? Certainly 'every country which is now Germany's neighbour is now uncertain of to-morrow, and every country which values its national identity and sovereignty stands warned against the danger from within inspired from without'. After contrasting 'the two conflicting theses' which divide the world—that of collective security, culminating in the machinery of the Covenant or the

Genevan Protocol, and that which rejects all commitments in advance of a given situation—he argued that when there was no apparent guarantee against ‘ambitious schemes of domination’, there was bound to be ‘very much greater readiness’ to consider ‘the acceptance of wider mutual obligations’. The Government had ‘not failed to draw a moral from these events’, and had at once put themselves ‘in close and practical consultation’, not only with the Dominions, but with other Governments concerned. He closed with historical reflections. ‘It has never in the long run proved possible to stamp out the spirit of free peoples. If history is any guide, the German people may yet regret the action that has been taken in their name against the people of Czechoslovakia’. The Czechs, not for the first time, have lost their independence, ‘but they have never lost that which is the foundation of independence—the love of liberty’. And ‘just as after the last War the world watched the emergence of the Czech nation, so it will watch to-day their efforts to preserve intact their cultural identity, and, more important, their spirit of freedom under the last and most cruel blow of which they have been victims’.

The repercussions were immediate. The British, French, American and Russian Governments withheld their recognition of the annexation, and in those countries and in Poland the Czechoslovak Legations remained in the hands of their legitimate holders. Sir Neville Henderson and his French and Russian colleagues were recalled from Berlin ‘for consultation’: the American Ambassador had been absent since the November pogroms. In most of the lesser States, it is true, German pressure secured recognition of the new position and surrender of diplomatic rights. In London the Treasury promptly imposed an embargo

on all Czech assets in England, lest the German Government should apply the same methods as those by which it plundered the Jews after the November pogroms. The impending visit of Mr. Oliver Stanley to Berlin for trade discussions was cancelled, while his colleague Mr. Hudson was pointedly allowed to proceed upon his journey to Warsaw, Moscow, Helsingfors and Stockholm. Meanwhile very promising negotiations conducted through the Federation of British Industries also inevitably collapsed.

## CHAPTER VI

### FROM PRAGUE TO DANZIG

'It would be difficult to over-estimate the extent of this far-reaching revolution in British Foreign Policy. It has been sudden, but it has also been complete, so complete that it would be difficult to find a parallel for it in our long history.'

Mr. Eden, in Paris, 15 June, 1939.

THE Nazi Press, with its unequalled gift for indicting others for its own favourite practices, now indulged in a wholesale denunciation of Britain for her threats to Germany. 'We are at a decisive point,' wrote the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 'where England must decide whether she admits Germany's continental position or not. . . . Now that the challenge has gone forth, we of course take it up.' The full effrontery of this attitude became apparent when the German Government, not content with its lightning conquest of Czechoslovakia, almost instantly threatened fresh aggression in two other parts of Europe.

#### *The Memelland*

Already on 21 March the Lithuanian Government, yielding to the imminent danger of invasion, decided to transfer the Memelland to Germany, while declaring that no more territory would be surrendered without resistance. The fact that Lithuania yielded to duress of the kind invariably applied by the Nazis was emphasized by the precipitate arrival in Memel, within forty-eight hours of the decision, of Herr Hitler and the entire German Baltic fleet. This represented yet another breach of faith; for in September the Führer had categorically assured Mr. Chamberlain that he would not insist on any territorial change at Memel,



provided Lithuania carried out the statute. But he preferred to employ the method of the mailed fist, and thereby strengthen the process of general intimidation among the lesser States.

With the one exception of South Tirol there was no place where Germany's case for treaty revision was so strong as in Memel, and the world had come to recognize that Lithuanian rule in Memel had not justified itself. Nowhere, therefore, had Germany a better prospect of success by persuasion and negotiation: but it was more in conformity with the Führer's mood to use brute force, and thereby impress a cowed world.

### *Roumania*

Meanwhile a most determined economic offensive was being directed against Roumania, and it required no little courage on the part of King Carol and his Premier M. Calinescu to resist. It was doubtless no accident that Herr Wohlthat, the delegate of Marshal Göring's Four Year Plan, should have been in Bucarest at the critical moment, engaged upon negotiations for a commercial treaty. In essence, the German plan was that Roumania should consent to the immediate abandonment of all native industrial undertakings and revert as quickly as possible to the status of a purely agrarian State, that Germany should acquire a lien upon Roumania's entire surplus of grain, oil and timber, in other words an export monopoly, and that in return for this double surrender the Reich should guarantee Roumania's territorial integrity. Such designs vividly recalled the memory of the Treaty of Bucarest, by which in May 1918 Germany and her allies dictated an absolute exploitation and control of Roumanian economic resources for two whole generations to come.

A fortunate Press indiscretion revealed the proposed terms before the attempted dictation had had time to succeed: in Roumania itself national sentiment at once reacted vigorously against the danger, and even the party leaders most critical of King Carol and his régime now rallied in their support, while the publicity given to the incident brought home to Western public opinion the imminent danger of Germany establishing by a lightning stroke her hegemony throughout South-eastern Europe. The trade agreement signed on 23 March went very far to meet Germany's import requirements and to encourage German exploitation of Roumania's forests and mines—notably oil, manganese, chromium and bauxite. But even those most suspicious of German designs agreed that all depended upon the interpretation put upon it, and this of course in its turn upon the extent to which Roumanian policy stiffened or weakened according to the powers of resistance displayed by the Western Powers. It is not too much to say that during the fortnight following the Prague *coup* all the lesser Powers of Europe reeled under the blow and waited breathlessly to see whether at long last the democracies were capable of calling a halt to aggression, or whether alternately they were prepared to declare themselves disinterested in South-eastern Europe and leave Germany unchallenged and unchallengeable. Meanwhile more than ever Germany seemed not merely to hold the initiative, but to have a rich choice of fresh fields of adventure. Indeed, speculation was rife as to whether she would stretch out her hand towards the Ukraine, using Hungary as an instrument to enforce Roumanian submission, or again would now seek to encircle Poland as she had already so successfully encircled Czechoslovakia, or again might give her backing

to some Italian adventure in the Mediterranean, or might even turn west or north, by a sudden thrust at Holland, Switzerland, Denmark or the Baltic States. It is characteristic of the profound mistrust with which Nazi policy had come to be regarded, that in one form or another a highly plausible case could be put forward for each of these many alternatives.

For the moment Roumania seemed in even more imminent danger than Poland, and the question arose whether Germany would win Hungary's military support by the bait of Transylvania, her own objective being the Roumanian oilfields. Given Jugoslavia's equivocal attitude and Poland's reluctance to offend Hungary, Bucarest had to look anxiously for allies whose help could be immediate. Turkey's backing was already assured, but in the ultimate issue Roumania's fate depended on whether she could count on the Western Powers, who were all too remote, and on Russia, whose help might become overpowering. Tardily enough, it came to be realized that if Roumania were once defeated Germany would be master of the Black Sea, her control of Turkey and of the Straits would only be a question of time, and hence that Roumanian independence is bound up with British sea-power and sea-routes. Hence the necessity for a Western guarantee to Roumania, negotiations for which proceeded parallel with those with Poland.

### *France and Italy*

Two speeches in the last week of March served to define the attitude of France and Italy to the Prague outrage. On 22 March the Duce, speaking on the twentieth anniversary of the Fascist Party, directed the usual gibes against 'the pluto-democratic lie-shop', scoffed at the 'attempts to unhinge the Axis' and laid

the main stress on armaments. In one passage he described professional pacifists as 'particularly detestable', and 'perpetual peace' as 'a catastrophe for human civilization', but added his opinion 'that a long period of peace is necessary to safeguard the development of European civilization'. This was hailed in some quarters as conciliatory and peaceful: it was more than set off by abusive references to France, and by insistence on the three problems of Tunisia, Djibuti and Suez. France must not complain if the furrow dividing the two countries grows so deep that it will be an arduous, if not impossible, task to fill it up. He desired no more talk about 'brotherly, sisterly, cousinly or other such bastard relations'. No!—relations between States were relations of force. The Mediterranean was a vital space for Italy—'geographically, historically, politically and militarily', and this included the Adriatic, where, he was careful to add, the Slavs also had interests. The dominant note was armament—'more guns, more ships, more aeroplanes, at all costs and by every means, even if we must make a clean sweep of all that we call civilian life. . . . Woe to the unarmed.'

Three days later M. Daladier struck an altogether different note, laying equal stress on France's unity and calm resolution, her military strength and reviving finances, but also her desire to put all her forces at the service of peace. Instead of polemizing with the Duce, he contented himself with publishing the Italian Note of 17 December, 1938, by which Mussolini had denounced the Italo-French Agreement of 1935. It thus transpired that Mussolini's public reference to that note, as though it contained 'precise Italian claims', was entirely misleading, and that 'there was no question of Suez, Djibuti and Tunisia being mentioned in it'. The Treaty had been denounced because the

conquest of Abyssinia by the Italian 'Empire' had 'created new rights in favour of Italy'—an argument for which no justification could be found in international law, and which Daladier firmly repudiated. A comparison of the two speeches inevitably leaves an impression of arrogance and guile on the Italian side, together with a sense of the insensate folly of Western statesmen in believing that the Duce could be wiled away from an alliance of which he has become the willing slave, because it fits in with his own political creed and forms the very antithesis of the democratic outlook.

### *Ready to Pounce*

Flushed with its bloodless successes in Prague and Memel, the National Socialist Government, during the last week of March, seemed to be contemplating action in yet another direction. The concentric assaults of the Nazi Press upon Poland, and the sudden invention of 'atrocities' committed by the Poles on their German minority, were an almost exact replica of the tactics employed in the Sudeten question last September. Simultaneously Britain was denounced for her hostility to German expansion 'in an area where British interests are not affected', the Munich Agreement having been assumed, in German circles, to mean that Britain and France had declared their *désintéressement* throughout Eastern Europe and given Germany a free hand. The idea that any one had the right to object on the one hand to a policy of conquest against helpless neighbours, or on the other hand to a radical disturbance of the balance of forces on the Continent, hardly seems to have occurred to those responsible for Nazi policy. Yet at one and the same moment Germany was shouting at British designs of encirclement and herself planning the encirclement of Poland

by troop movements in Silesia and Slovakia, in Danzig and Lithuania.

Thus Poland, thanks above all to the pusillanimity of the Western Powers during the Munich crisis, but thanks also to the shortsighted and selfish attitude of her own Government in the Teschen question, already found herself between those very pincers by which Germany had encircled Czechoslovakia, now readjusted and pressing into her own flesh. What should have been an allied army, firmly entrenched to resist aggression, had been recklessly sacrificed, its national discipline undermined by the sabotage of friends and all its military resources transferred to the enemy. Poland was dangerously isolated, and unless she could be sure that the Western Powers would give her more efficient support than had been vouchsafed to Czechoslovakia, she too might be forced into the sphere of German domination.

### *Guarantee to Poland*

Meeting under the urgency of this danger, and surrounded by the ruins of appeasement, the British Cabinet on 31 March decided upon a far-reaching change of policy. Mr. Chamberlain in his brief statement to the House, reaffirmed his desire for 'free negotiations between the parties concerned' and his belief 'that there should be no question incapable of solution by peaceful means', but he went on to state that pending 'certain consultations' with other Governments, the British Government 'in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces . . . would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all the support in their power'. Poland

had already been given this assurance, in the name of France as well as of Britain. In answer to questions from the Opposition Mr. Chamberlain said that he would 'welcome the maximum co-operation' from all Powers, including Russia, that there were 'no ideological impediments between us and the U.S.S.R.', and that the Dominions had been 'kept fully informed'.

The immense significance of this bald announcement was at once realized by Parliament, the Press and public opinion. For the first time in British history an unrestricted military commitment had been assumed towards a country of Eastern Europe whose geographical position rendered direct help impossible. What had been persistently refused to France, our closest ally and associate, both before and after the War, until the crumbling of the Munich settlement last winter—this very concession is now suddenly granted 'outright to a country at the other end of Europe'. And, to quote the *Daily Telegraph*, 'it is a *volte-face* of which not the least notable feature is the unanimous and enthusiastic support it enjoys with every section of opinion in Parliament and in the country. Moreover, it was left in Poland's hands to decide when the case of aggression, and therefore of obligation, arose. Yet scarcely a voice was raised in protest against such almost unheard-of and unprecedented generosity. This is the measure of the miracle of unity wrought in British minds by Hitler's last *coup*.'

In the full-dress debate which followed on 3 April Mr. Chamberlain did not hesitate to describe his Government's decision as 'a tremendous departure from anything which this country has undertaken hitherto', and as 'a new epoch in our foreign policy'. Still obstinately arguing that the Czech crisis of last September did not justify new commitments, he

pointed to German's broken pledges as 'the new factor which has completely destroyed our confidence' and compelled us to this 'great departure'. There was 'no threat to Germany so long as Germany will be a good neighbour': and it was 'fantastic' to talk of encirclement for any aggressive end. He closed with a reference to Soviet Russia franker than any he had ever made. Where the independence of all States threatened by aggression was concerned, he contended, 'ideological differences do not really count', and 'we welcome the co-operation of any country, whatever may be its internal system of government, not in aggression, but in resistance to aggression'. He hoped that the Government's action would be a turning-point towards 'a more wholesome era of reason', and away from 'war, which wins nothing, cures nothing, ends nothing'.

The extent to which opinion had already rallied behind this new policy was shown by the fact that it was accepted not merely by the Government's own big battalions, but by Mr. Churchill, who to his obvious surprise found himself 'in most complete agreement with the Prime Minister', by Sir Archibald Sinclair, despite his denunciation of Sir John Simon as 'the evil genius of British foreign policy', and again by the Labour leaders and the solitary Communist member. Only in one quarter was a discordant note struck, when *The Times*' leader of 1 April deprecated the idea of 'fighting for Danzig' and tried to interpret our guarantee of Poland as applying only to its independence, but not to its integrity. This 'sinister passage'<sup>1</sup> was all too reminiscent of that other leader of 7 September which had suggested the partition of Czechoslovakia and set in motion the Munich avalanche. Colonel Beck on his arrival in London received the strongest

<sup>1</sup> The phrase was used by Mr. Churchill in the debate of 3 April.



assurances that *The Times* was not speaking for the Government. But he may have reminded his hosts that the September leader also had been followed by official disclaimers, and refused to be reassured until all idea of such a precedent was repudiated. He returned to Warsaw in the belief that the Pact meant what it said, and that it lay with Poland to decide when her independence was threatened.

### *Hitler's Philippics*

Meanwhile the Dictators were not slow to express their displeasure at the Western world's refusal to submit meekly to yet another accomplished fact. The Fuhrer, having already shot his two bolts, contented himself with a furious philippic against Britain, but behind the scenes encouraged the Duce to help himself in the south while there was yet time—calculating, there can be little doubt, that to shove him into military adventures would render him almost irrevocably the prisoner of the Axis. Starting with the historical phantasy of 'encirclement', and the claim that Germany remained undefeated on land, by sea, and in the air 'and only lost the War through lying propaganda', he dwelt upon Germany's 'vital interests' and need for 'living room' (*Lebensraum*), and declined to tolerate the growth of 'satellite States' which might become 'an instrument against Germany in war'. 'We have no hatred against the Czech people, and would have had nothing against an independent Czech State, if it had had no oppressed Germans and had not been an instrument for future attack. . . . This State had lost its internal ability to live. I have reunited what had to be reunited on historical and geographical lines, and from every reasonable point of view. The Czech people will have more liberty than the oppressed

peoples of the "virtuous" nations.' He then reiterated his refusal to tolerate encirclement, hinted at the possibility of abandoning the Naval Pact with Britain, ridiculed the idea of 'cracks or breaks in the Axis', and contrasted its firmness with 'the transitory ties of heterogeneous bodies' on the other side. If it were said that there was no ideological difference between Britain and Soviet Russia—an obvious allusion to Mr. Chamberlain's recent answer to a question in the House—this only served to confirm his view of the relations between Democracy and Marxism and Communism. In every line of this there was clear defiance of an international order resting on anything save force. The official German Press (and of course there is no other) tried to lay the whole blame upon the 'aggressive' democracies, arguing that 'the Reich has no intention of waiting till the net of encirclement has closed and become unbreakable'. The *Angriff* in particular threatened to forestall any attempt at encirclement and treated the British Press as a subject for pathological rather than diplomatic or political treatment.

An interesting example of Nazi vituperation was furnished a week later by Dr. Ley, leader of the German 'Labour Front', whose intimate connexion with the youth movements gives him an altogether special position, and who earlier in the year had been on a visit to England. In the *Angriff* he accused England of rage due to fear, nervousness, ill-will and envy. 'England', he said, 'hates us because we know her for what she is.' This from the innermost Nazi ring.

### *The Italian Invasion of Albania*

On the very same day the call was answered by Italy. The concentration of Italian troops at Bari

and Brindisi reached proportions that could no longer be concealed. On 4 April Lord Perth called on Count Ciano and was fobbed off with perfidious evasions, while the official Bari broadcast denied any Italian design upon Albanian independence or integrity. The actual *coup*, by a crowning cynicism, 'was reserved for Good Friday. While the attention of Christendom was concentrated upon the supreme tragedy of the Cross, an ostensibly Christian nation invaded, in almost overwhelming force, the smallest and most helpless of all the European States. Insult was added to injury by the official Roman communiqué, which treated the invasion as rendered necessary by 'the menacing attitude of Albanian armed bands'—just as the invasion of Abyssinia had been rendered necessary by Haile Selassie's armed aggression, and the extinction of Czechoslovakia by the imminent Czech menace to helpless Germany. In reality, all Italian subjects in Albania had been withdrawn three days earlier, and it had long been notorious that King Zog and his people were already completely at the mercy of Italy from the financial, economic and military point of view. It is sufficient to point out that the entire Albanian army was 12,000 strong. The entirely unconvincing version put forward by Count Ciano as justification for an act of brigandage, was that King Zog had always been a bad ally, but that things became impossible in March because the King, after proposing a closer alliance, asked for the help of Italian troops against Yugoslavia, and when Italy refused, concentrated his army in Central Albania and organized anti-Italian demonstrations. If it be irreverent to call this a cock-and-bull story, no one will fail to be reminded of the fable of the wolf and the lamb.

The best commentary may be pieced together from

three leaders of the same day (10 April) published by three of the foremost British journals. In the words of *The Times*, 'The recent exploits of the Axis have exalted the junior partner much more than the original patentee of the totalitarian idea: it was time for Italian pride to be justified: and Albania was small and weak enough to offer the prospect of a dramatic *coup* with a desirable economy of risk.' The Albanian *coup* is a classic illustration of the gangster methods now in vogue. 'The Axis Powers', as the *Manchester Guardian* neatly put it, 'will without excuse and without warning—let both points be noted—seize any country which displays two qualifications. First, they would prefer to seize it without the prospect of a general war—but that limitation may not last—and secondly, the seizure must strengthen their strategic position, should such a war be threatened or break out.' 'It now becomes as clear as daylight,' wrote the *Daily Telegraph*, 'that all the aggressive moves which have kept Europe in incessant agitation since the occupation of the demilitarized zone, are part of a carefully planned design for the building up of an irresistible combination on the international chessboard.'

As in the case of Abyssinia, Italy thus broke a whole series of pledges. In 1926 she had freely undertaken to uphold 'the political, juridical and territorial *status quo* of Albania'. By the Treaty of Tiranë (27 November, 1926) she had declared any change in that *status quo* to be contrary to 'the common political interests' of the two countries, and had pledged herself to 'mutual support and cordial collaboration' and arbitration of disputes. The Anglo-Italian Convention of 2 January 1937 pledged Italy to respect 'the *status quo* as regards national sovereignty of territory in the Mediterranean area', and this was repeated in the Agreement of 16

April 1938. Moreover, as recently as January 1939 Signor Mussolini had given fresh verbal assurances to Mr. Chamberlain during the latter's visit to Rome. In face of all this the German Government had no difficulty in announcing officially that it regarded Italian action as fully in accord with the Treaty of Tirana, and as 'juridically incontestable', and treated it as of no concern whatever of the 'encirclers'. This was of course merely a fresh variation of the view that force alone is valid in international affairs, and that each country's action is determined exclusively by its own selfish interests and lusts, without regard for an 'international order'. It is not too much to add that the Axis method of deliberately flouting its opponents is employed as a convenient instrument for testing their sluggish reactions.

### *Strategic Aims*

The conquest of Albania is in some respects even more indefensible than that of Czechoslovakia. No neighbour can put forward national claims against her, for the excellent reason that her population is exclusively Albanian, though considerable Albanian minorities live within the Greek and Yugoslav borders. Nor is it possible to make play with the reversal of an unjust post-War settlement: for Albania was peculiarly the offspring of pre-War international agreement and, not least of all, of a compromise between the claims of Austria-Hungary and Italy, achieved largely by the mediation of Germany, with the concurrence of the other Powers. For years past her King and Government had been reduced to a state of complete subservience towards Italy: her budget and finances, her exiguous foreign trade, were under Italian control, and the most that she could hope for was to preserve

self-government and national idiosyncrasies. That she could ever defy, or be a danger to, Italy was obviously out of the question. Thus the real explanation for the *coup* is to be sought elsewhere, and it is simple enough. The two Dictators, while shouting about their own encirclement by the wicked democracies, have all the time been bent upon the strategic encirclement of their opponents: and in this case the aim is to encircle Yugoslavia, to drive a wedge between her and Greece, to force her on to the defensive on her southern frontier and to open up a line of advance upon Skoplje (giving direct contact with Bulgaria) and upon Salonica (leading eventually to the Straits). Faced with the possibility of naval action on the Dalmatian coast, and of combined pressure from Germany on the Slovene border and from Hungary along the all too open frontier north of Belgrade, Yugoslavia's strategic position would be far from enviable, even though Turkey and Roumania could prevent Bulgaria from taking any rash aggressive action against her. Unquestionably the aim of Germany was to engage Italy in Balkan adventures, which would render her increasingly dependent upon the Axis. If Salonica were once in Italian hands, Yugoslavia would in effect be shut off from the sea (since her merchant shipping could be so easily blockaded in the Adriatic) and perhaps forced to withdraw from the Balkan League and rely on a precarious neutrality.

### *Guarantee to Greece*

The immediate threat, however, was to Greece, and here at least timely action saved the situation. During the parliamentary debate of 13 April Mr. Chamberlain, following with unwonted effect his deliberate method of understatement, quoted the assurances given only six days earlier by Count Ciano to Lord Perth, to the effect

that Italy fully intended to respect Albanian independence, and the 'profound misgivings' which the latter had voiced on behalf of the British Government. He next alluded to a conversation on the 8th between Lord Halifax and the Italian Chargé d'Affaires, in which Signor Crolla, in true Axis fashion, had tried to turn his opponent's weapon against himself by speaking of the 'dangerous reactions' which any *British* occupation of Corfu might create in Italy. Lord Halifax naturally rejoined that the British Government had no such intentions, but 'would take a very grave view if *any one else* occupied the island'. The Prime Minister went on to state that on Easter Sunday news had come to London from the British Minister in Athens and from the Greek Government itself, 'that Italy was intending to attack Corfu in the near future', and that the Greek Minister in London confirmed his Government's 'anxiety and uneasiness'. It is clear that the firmness and plain speech shown by Lord Halifax in further conversations with Signor Crolla brought home to the Italian Government the full danger of action against Greece: and on 10 April Athens received most explicit assurances from the Duce that Greek independence was absolutely safe, and that rumours of aggression 'could only have been circulated by *agents-provocateurs*'.

The Prime Minister was careful not to treat the Duce's assurances as dispelling 'the general uneasiness': on the contrary, 'once confidence has been roughly shaken, it is not so easily re-established'. He and the Government had in his view 'both a duty and a service to perform by leaving no doubt in the mind of any one as to their position'. He therefore announced that they 'attached the greatest importance to the avoidance of disturbance by force, or threats of force, of the *status*

quo in the Mediterranean and the Balkan Peninsula', and would 'feel bound at once to lend all the support in their power' to either Greece or Roumania, if action were taken 'that clearly threatens' the independence of either Power.

At the same time he declined to denounce the Anglo-Italian Agreement or to admit that its conclusion a year ago had been in any way mistaken: and he rejoiced at 'the restoration of friendly feelings between the Italian people and the people of this country'. In answer to Opposition cries he added that the Government was keeping in the closest touch with the representatives of Russia, and endeavouring 'so to marshal the forces which are still in favour of peace and which are willing to resist aggression, that our efforts may be successful'.

In many quarters the reluctance of Mr. Chamberlain to criticize the Duce for action exactly similar to that for which he had so strongly condemned the Führer, was assumed to be due to a last lingering illusion that Italy could still be detached from the Axis. The *Manchester Guardian* accused him 'of sending another of his personal letters to Mussolini', though this was flatly contradicted in official circles. But the contrast between his attitude and that of America was obvious to every reader of the Press. A formal statement issued at Washington, after consultation between the President and the Secretary of State, roundly described the Albanian *coup* as 'unquestionably an additional threat to the peace of the world', which was bound 'further to destroy confidence and undermine economic stability in every country in the world'. This, and the reasoned comments of the great American journals, were felt to be a much greater encouragement to the forces of international law and order than the hesitations of the British Premier. One highly plausible explanation put



forward was that London was obliged to hold back until the Italian 'volunteer' forces had been withdrawn from Spain: and meanwhile rumours circulated as to the concentration of Italian troops, with German stiffening, along the borders of Libya and Egypt. In all this period the art of blackmail by propagandist suggestion through Press and radio was carried to singular lengths, and the British Government's restraint of utterance seems to have confirmed the Axis Powers in the belief that it did not mean business, and in particular that it could not be relied upon to support Poland to the length of war. Mr. Lloyd George was not alone when he asked Mr. Chamberlain whether his pronouncements since 15 March were 'merely words, to bridge over a spate of national resentment', or whether he really meant them: for unless he did so, 'Hitler and Mussolini will strike again'.

Thus step by step the Government had embarked upon a policy of resistance to the tide of aggression in Eastern Europe, but one which rested rather on piecemeal improvisation than upon a clear-cut project: and in the debate which followed the Prime Minister's declaration the outstanding and essential facts were submerged in a flood of irrelevant eloquence. It was Mr. Eden who insisted that in the urgent need for checking the 'smash and grab' method in European affairs, we had been constrained to adopt a new policy, based on 'far-reaching commitments', far in excess of those implied in the League Covenant, but necessary if a Peace Front were to be built up, strong enough to enforce 'some sense of respect for international engagements'. It was Mr. Churchill who pointed out that 'there is absolutely no halfway house', and that a Peace Bloc, to be effective, must include Soviet Russia, but that 'to go about Europe asking favours' was not the

best means to such an end. It was the latter statesman again who drew the House's attention to the double fact that our Intelligence Service had been fully informed in advance as to impending events in Bohemia and Albania, but that during the Italian *coup* the Mediterranean fleet had been scattered 'from one end of that sea to the other'.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to record that during the parallel debate in the House of Lords Lord Lothian argued that 'there was not the slightest prospect of dividing the two Dictators', and associated himself with Mr. Churchill's plea for a 'grand alliance in the east of Europe', in which Russia would be 'absolutely vital'. Lord Halifax very frankly recognized this importance of Russian collaboration; nothing, he said, could be further from the thought of the Government than to interpose 'ideological differences' in the way of that collaboration.<sup>2</sup>

### *American Initiative*

Attentive students of chronology will already have observed that for over a year past every fresh act of aggression in Europe was met by a corresponding stiffening of American opinion, both official and unofficial, though unhappily the lack of response in the democratic countries only too often led to a relapse into isolationism and suspicion. This was specially marked during the September crisis, when President

<sup>1</sup> Mr Churchill, whose record at the Admiralty, and especially in July 1914, gives him a better right to speak on such matters than any other British statesman, was careful to point out that the error had since been rectified (otherwise he would not have spoken *coram publico*). He was entitled to add that if that fleet 'had been concentrated and cruising in the Ionian Sea, the Albanian adventure would never have been undertaken'.

<sup>2</sup> In this debate Lord Astor retracted his former belief in negotiation with the Dictators, whose method, he now saw, 'was to say that black was white, in the hope that the world would somehow believe them'.

Roosevelt's double initiative was virtually disregarded by the Western Powers, to his no small annoyance.<sup>1</sup> The spontaneous manner in which both countries reacted to the pogroms brought them nearer into line again, and the marked way in which Mr. Chamberlain associated himself with the President's New Year pronouncements had a most salutary effect upon American opinion. But doubt lingered in many American minds: was British policy in any way swayed by those principles of democracy and international order on which alone American opinion could be mobilized for action? Did it not far rather stand convicted of cynical opportunism, in view of its ever-recurring reluctance to condemn international wrongdoing, its cryptic overtures to Hitlerism, its relative condonement of Italian perfidy and aggression?

All the more striking, then, was President Roosevelt's fresh pronouncement of policy before the Pan-American Union at Washington on 14 April. While strongly reminiscent of President Wilson at his best, it breathed a fresher, more human, less doctrinaire atmosphere. Pan-America, he pointed out, had been achieved by open agreement, 'not as a result of wars, but as a result of our will to peace'. There was nothing to prevent the Old World following similar lines. 'Men are not prisoners of fate: they are only prisoners in their own minds. They have within themselves the power to become free at any moment.' Yet only a few days ago the head of a great nation had referred to his country as a prisoner in the Mediterranean. A little later

<sup>1</sup> On 28 September the President's secretary, Mr. Early, issued a statement—too little heeded in Europe—to the effect that Munich did not correspond to the President's intentions, and that his idea had been a Conference of the countries interested (i.e. including Czechoslovakia, Poland, Roumania and Hungary) to be held in a neutral country, and not a directory of three, sitting in the territory of one of the litigants.

another Chief of State, on learning that a neighbouring country had agreed to defend the independence of another neighbour, characterized that agreement as a threat, as an encirclement. Yet there is no such thing as encirclement, or threatening, or imprisoning, any peaceful nation by other peaceful nations. The guarantee against overseas attack offered by the United States to Canada, the pledges of joint defence entered upon by 'the twenty-one American nations' at Buenos Ayres in 1936 and again at Lima in 1938 were not felt by any one of them as a threat or an encirclement, 'for the simple reason that none of them has any wish to aggression or any desire to establish dominance or mastery. If that process can be successful here, is it too much to hope that a similar intellectual and spiritual process may succeed elsewhere? Do we really have to assume that nations can find no better methods of realizing their destinies than those which were used by the Huns and Vandals 1,500 years ago? The American peace which we celebrate to-day has no quality of weakness in it. We are prepared to maintain it and to defend it to the fullest extent of our strength, matching force to force if any attempt is made to subvert our institutions or to impair the independence of any one of our group.'

But America had the right to speak to the rest of a world that is shrinking daily in the light of aerial developments: she too had a stake in world affairs, and 'our will to peace can be as powerful as our will to mutual defence'. The culminating phrase of the speech was an open challenge to the Dictators. 'The issue is really whether our civilization is to be dragged into the tragic vortex of unending militarism, punctuated by periodic wars, or whether we shall be able to maintain the ideal of peace, individuality, and civilization

as the fabric of our lives. We have the right to say that there shall not be an organization of world affairs which permits us no choice but to turn our countries into barracks, unless we be the vassals of some conquering Empire.'

This speech, however, proved to be merely an eloquent preface to a full-dress Presidential Message, dispatched on 16 April to the Fuhrer and Duce—a public message from one Chief of State to two others for which there is no obvious precedent. He opened with a blunt reminder that the constant fear of war in which hundreds of millions were living was of definite concern to the United States no less than other peoples. If war came, 'all the world, victor nations, vanquished nations and neutral nations, will suffer': but he refused to believe that 'the world is of necessity such a prisoner of destiny'. In the recent past three European nations and one in Africa 'had seen their independent existence terminated', while a vast territory in Asia had been occupied by a neighbouring State, and there were rumours of further acts of aggression. As, however, both statesmen had repeatedly asserted that their peoples had no desire for war, he urged upon them the solution of international problems 'at the council table'. 'The cause of peace would be advanced if the nations of the world were to obtain a frank statement relating to the present and future policy of Governments', and he therefore, representing a nation 'not involved in the immediate controversies', invited them to make such statements, with a view to communication to 'other nations now apprehensive as to the course which the policy of your Government may take'. Were they willing to 'give assurance that their armed forces would not attack or invade the territory of'—and here he enumerated no less than thirty independent

States (all but five in Europe)<sup>1</sup>—for a minimum period of ten years, but preferably for twenty-five? He could then transmit the answers to the Governments in question, and 'reciprocal assurances will bring to the world an immediate measure of relief'. Discussions in a peaceful atmosphere would then be possible, and the United States would 'gladly take part', and thereby promote a solution of the two major problems that confront the world—'progressive relief from the crushing burden of armaments', and 'the opening of avenues of international trade, to the end that every nation of the earth may be enabled to buy and sell on equal terms in the world market'. Heads of great Governments, he concluded, 'are literally responsible for the fate of humanity in the coming years', and he hoped that their answer would 'make it possible for humanity to lose fear and regain security for many years to come'.

Almost simultaneously with an utterance which the Dictators might be tempted to dismiss as mere pious vapouring, President Roosevelt took action calculated to remind the world that (declared and ardent democrat though he was) he was also head of one of the most powerful executive machines in the modern world. He announced that the American battle fleet would move from the Atlantic to its 'normal operating areas' in the Pacific. Thus within twenty-four hours he had solemnly restated the Monroe doctrine for the American Continent, demonstrated American power and interest in the Far East and announced America's direct interest in ending the European anarchy. It was only to be expected that the Dictator States would answer with scorn and abuse: but the chorus of inspired

<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted that all the surviving States of Europe, including Liechtenstein and Luxemburg, figure in the list, that 'Great Britain and Eire' figure as a simple unit, and that the other five are 'Iraq, the Arabias (classed thus together), Syria, Egypt and Iran.'

Press comment on 'a hypocritical and arrogant dispatch' and 'a coarse diversion and swindle', exceeded Dr. Goebbels' best efforts. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* dismissed the message as 'humbug', while Dr. Silex, editor of the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and one of the very few outstanding journalists left in Germany, dismissed the message as a 'new fraud à la Wilson' and accused the President of 'cunning' and 'impudence'. Grossest of all, however, was the comment of Herr von Ribbentrop's mouthpiece, the *Diplomatisch-politische Korrespondenz*, which accused Mr. Roosevelt of having for years openly identified himself with 'the ideological enemies of Germany' and in particular 'with the central headquarters of Bolshevism, the enemy of culture', and of now seeking to establish 'a front of revenge' and encirclement against Germany. The Italian Press was slightly less abusive, but the *Giornale d'Italia* flatly challenged the President's right to intervene in Europe: 'he is too well known as an anti-Fascist and as an unscrupulous political opportunist'. Italy, it added, 'will prefer to distinguish this man, who will be classed among the villains of history, from the people over whom he tyrannizes as Dictator'. The Duce's own paper, *Popolo d'Italia*, concentrated on 'the frightful ignorance, grotesque presumption and ridiculous arrogance' of 'this unheard-of document'. But behind all this abuse there lurked an embarrassed feeling that, in the words of the *New York Times*, their very violence would 'identify unmistakably the aggressors in advance of war, if war should come, and rally opinion on the side of the victims of aggression'. Above all, to democratic opinion in Europe, so long discouraged by the lack of any clear lead from their own leaders, the President's action was a trumpet call to endurance and renewed effort.

A week later, during a debate in the House of Lords, Lord Halifax gave an admirable summary of British policy, but still on somewhat abstract lines. He started with a frank examination of the causes which led to the breakdown of international machinery, and faced the awkward fact that 'there was now no accepted currency in the terms of international intercourse', while new doctrine was invented 'to justify policies of expansion'. He denied encirclement, and declared, 'We are not influenced by the fact that a country is authoritarian or the reverse: . . . we are influenced by the declared objects and purposes of its foreign policy'. Britain had never sought to block the export of raw materials, but as methods of free discussion and negotiation had been rejected, she 'had no option but to increase her strength, and to check the tendency to destroy and swallow, one by one, the independent nations of Europe'. In closing he defended 'the rights of the smaller nations' and 'the moral values' which underlie our civilization and 'are due to the influence and observance, however imperfect, of Christian thought and action'. Unless Europe is prepared to return to those principles, 'we are not likely to make much progress either in personal or international relations'. In one passage Lord Halifax expressly thanked Mr. Roosevelt for his recent initiative and declared the British Government to be 'in essential agreement'.

Meanwhile the Nazi Press adopted a noticeably shriller tone, Dr. Goebbels himself leading off in the *Völkischer Beobachter* with an article which treated Lord Halifax's speech as 'a medley of absurdities and platitudes'. Britain—Goebbels declared, perhaps with greater truth than he realized—had different conceptions of justice and morality from those current in Germany.



*Herr Hitler's Rejoinder*

During the last week of April there was a hushed note in Nazi Germany, inaugurated by Marshal Goring's announcement that 'Adolf Hitler is the greatest German of all time', and culminating in the Führer's speech of 28 April to the Reichstag. This had been prepared in a most characteristic manner by questions addressed from Berlin to a number of the countries on President Roosevelt's list. The Führer is evidently not acquainted with Aesop, or he would have avoided action so reminiscent of the wolf and the lamb. The idea that any sane country would be likely to answer that it was afraid of a German attack, suggests a fundamental lack of humour such as often goes together with megalomania. It is instructive to note the reactions of Holland and Switzerland, whose growing military preparations no one, however simple-minded, will ascribe to fear of a Franco-British invasion. The former, while disclaiming any fear of attack, pointed out that in the event of a general war she must 'reckon with every possibility'. The latter, while expressing her conviction that her neutrality will be respected by all her neighbours, made it clear that her army would at all costs defend it if violated.

Without feeling any confidence that German assurances to her surviving small neighbours are worth more than those to Austria and Czechoslovakia, it may still be argued that the Führer's reaction to the American demand for assurances does constitute a certain recognition that a world-conscience exists and must be reckoned with. No doubt every public assurance given makes the enormity of the next breach still more apparent, and only the sceptic will

deny that one final drop will one day make the brimming bowl flow over.

The Reichstag speech lasted for nearly two and a half hours, and it is therefore obviously impossible to do more than summarize its most outstanding arguments and phrases. Beginning with the usual denunciation of Versailles as 'the most infamous 'Diktat' of all times', and indulging in side hits at the plundering Jewish satellites, he repeated an earlier assurance of 1936 that the Saar settlement had done away with all territorial problems in Europe between France and Germany. He had, moreover, given binding declarations to many other States and noted with pleasure that Holland, Belgium, Switzerland and Denmark had expressed their desire for absolute neutrality, while with its three neighbours, Italy, Hungary and Jugoslavia the Reich was on very friendly terms.

A brief reference to the call of Providence, under which he led back his native East Mark to the Reich, brought him to Czechoslovakia, on which he expended much false history, culminating in the claim that Versailles assigned to Czechoslovakia the role of a satellite State, to prevent the consolidation of Central Europe, to provide a bridge for Bolshevik aggression and to serve as a mercenary of the democracies against Germany. Germany in her turn had decided to destroy 'this aerodrome for bombing-planes'. The Czechs would now have, as a matter of course, inside the Reich 'the right of their own nationality and the right to foster it'. Their State had broken up, not because Germany desired this, but because it was an artificial structure, already virtually in dissolution when the German Government decided to intervene 'in fulfilment of an obvious duty'. In passing, he admitted that he had already ceased to believe in a settlement by

co-operation as early as March 1938<sup>1</sup> and that he had refused his guarantee when, 'a few days before the dissolution of the State' in March 1939, Britain and France had raised the question with him, and he actually had the assurance to argue that after Munich the danger of a military conflict with Czechoslovakia was all the greater. Not a word to suggest that the old strategic frontier, all its military defences and many of its vital communications, were already in German hands! At this point he could not resist reeling off a list of the Czech armaments which he had 'confiscated and placed in safe keeping'—including 1,582 aeroplanes, 2,175 guns, 469 tanks, 43,876 machine-guns, and 'vast quantities' of other war material. 'Bohemia and Moravia, as remnants of former Czechoslovakia, have nothing more to do with the Munich Agreement, . . . which bore exclusively upon the mutual relationship of England and Germany'.

With this highly contentious statement he passed to the wider aspects of world-policy, and taking note of Mr. Chamberlain's now avowed distrust of German assurances, drew the wholly unjustified conclusion that in England 'a war against Germany is taken for granted'. He profoundly regretted this, since his only claim against Britain was for a return of the German colonies, which 'while yielding no real profit whatever to the English, are of vital importance to Germany'. Britain, by her resolve to oppose Germany 'under all circumstances, by a policy of encirclement' had removed the basis for the Naval Treaty, and he was notifying her to that effect. But he still hoped to avoid an armament race with Britain and was ready for renewed negotiations.

<sup>1</sup> An illuminating commentary upon the events of March–September, as described *supra*, pp 14–54.

He then turned to Poland, admitting its need for free access to the sea, but claiming Danzig as a German city. Some months earlier he had made Poland an offer which represented 'the greatest possible concession in the interest of European peace'. By it Danzig would return as a Free State to the framework of the Reich, and Germany would acquire a route and railway across the Corridor. In return for this Germany would recognize Polish rights in Danzig, give her a free harbour there, accept the existing frontiers as final, conclude a twenty-five year treaty of non-aggression with Poland and consent to a joint triangular guarantee of Slovakia by Germany, Poland and Hungary. But 'under pressure of a lying international campaign', Poland rejected this offer and declared herself only willing to negotiate a substitute for the League High Commissioner in Danzig, and to consider facilities for transit trade through the Corridor. As, moreover, the British guarantee to Poland was an unilateral infringement of his agreement with Marshal Pilsudski, he now regarded the latter as 'no longer in existence', and had notified Warsaw to that effect, though graciously willing to resume discussions (see *infra*, p. 250).

The remainder of the speech was an answer to President Roosevelt, delivered in a tone whose arrogance can only be fully appreciated by those who listened to it. Point by point he 'told off' his fellow Chief of State. The fear of war to which Mr. Roosevelt had alluded was due entirely to 'unbridled Press agitation' and had existed since time immemorial: since 1919 there had been fourteen wars and twenty-eight 'violent interventions and sanctions', in which the Western States, but not Germany, had been involved. Referring to the three European nations whose independence

had been terminated, the Fuhrer affected not to know which were meant, and denounced the suggestion of further aggression as 'an offence against world-peace'. He proclaimed himself a sceptic as to settlement at the council table, especially as America herself, by her failure to join the League, had given sharp expression to such distrust. Germany would never again 'enter a conference defenceless', or accept such a conference as tribunal.

Passing to the President's request for assurances of non-aggression, the Fuhrer read aloud—in a mocking sarcastic tone, interspersed by laughter and applause—the list of the thirty States, and indicated that in every case where he had made inquiries the State in question had replied in the negative. Germany was none the less ready to give such an assurance, 'on a basis of absolute reciprocity', provided always that she received a direct request and 'appropriate proposals' from the particular State. He had not, however, been able to ask every nation on the list: Syria, for instance, and certain others were 'at present not in possession of their freedom, but occupied and deprived of their rights by the military agents of democratic States'. On the matter of disarmament he had as long ago as 1934 made proposals of limitation, and had only begun to rearm when these had been 'finally rejected'. He had no desire for war, had not conducted any war and was not aware for what purpose he should wage war. The President had suggested that America's aloofness from European controversies might make him a better intermediary, but the Fuhrer merely retorted by the suggestion that he might ask for a definition of American aims. 'We Germans support a similar doctrine to the Monroe doctrine for Europe and for the territories and interests of the Greater German Reich.'

As regards existing barriers to world-trade, he made yet another cheap debating point against the President by arguing that he should use his great influence in the first instance by adopting free trade for the United States. Towards the close he reverted to his favourite contention that Germany laid down her arms 'to the so-called victors' on the basis of the Fourteen Points: and he suggested that 'it would be a noble act if President Franklin Roosevelt would redeem the promises made by President Woodrow Wilson'. The peroration was devoted to his own achievements in the last six years in conquering chaos, restoring order, solving unemployment and re-establishing 'the historic unit of the German living space'. High upon the long list stood his own endeavour 'to destroy sheet by sheet the treaty which contains the vilest oppression which human beings have ever been expected to put up with'. Modesty was never a failing of 'the greatest German', and it was not strongly in evidence when he claimed to have done all this by his own energy and contrasted with it President Roosevelt's 'much easier task'. American conditions were on a much larger scale than German, and hence the President might 'perhaps believe that his intervention and action can be effective everywhere'. Providence had placed Hitler in a much smaller area, but more precious, 'because it is limited to my own people': but 'this is the way in which I can be of most service to that in which we are all concerned, namely the justice, well-being, progress and peace of the whole human community'.

It is impossible to argue with a tornado, and this speech, even more than any of its predecessors, made it absolutely clear that no counter-arguments would be of the slightest avail, and that its author, just as he exacted blind obedience, punctuated by subservient and frenetic

applause, from the 862 so-called 'deputies', addressed the rest of the world, and even the Head of the American State, in the language of '*sic volo, sic jubeo*'. When he withdrew once more to his Alpine Valhalla, the first and strongest reaction of the outside world was a sense of fatality and depression: a Dictator of this type was obviously not amenable to reason or discussion, and would only react to overwhelming force.

If we endeavour to concentrate our criticism upon the most vital issue which the speech raised, we are first of all struck by the arbitrary way in which the Fuhrer shifts from one line of argument to another, yet apparently without any consciousness of having done so. He had obviously failed to realize that it was his naked act of aggression against Czechoslovakia in March that had changed the whole outlook of the world towards Germany, and, followed by similar acts of brute force at Memel and in Albania, had forced most of the lesser States of Europe to ask themselves which would be the next victim, and to look around for armaments and protective alliances. In March he had sought to justify his seizure of Prague by the need for disarming imaginary Czech terrorists<sup>1</sup> and their military abettors. In his speech at Wilhelmshaven he laid his main stress on the need for destroying an instrument which was to be used against Germany in war, though he did not indicate where the attack of Germany was coming from, or how the Czechs, after the loss of all their strategic defences and much of their economic resources, could have been so insane as to contemplate

<sup>1</sup> It is notorious that the German troops, on entering Prague and other Czech towns, expected to find traces of massacre and disorder. When, on the contrary they realized that complete order and discipline prevailed, and that not a single German had been killed, they tried to fraternize with the population and were genuinely hurt and puzzled when their overtures were repelled.

any kind of aggression. In the Reichstag, however, he argued that an independent economic existence of Bohemia and Moravia was 'impossible except on the basis of a relationship with the German nation and German economy', that Czech culture is mainly due to German influences, that the Czech State was 'a latent threat to the German nation', and indeed was 'an unnatural and artificial creation' and 'finally split up of its own accord'—above all that the Munich Agreement could 'under no circumstances be regarded as final', and that his 'solution' of the Czech problem had nothing to do with that Agreement, and was 'not subject to English criticism or supervision', just as English measures in Northern Ireland were no concern of Germany.

His strange faculty of blending insincerity and self-deception was well illustrated by his renewed and vehement insistence that in May 1938 Germany had not mobilized 'one single man'. This was the merest playing with words, for no one ever suggested that there had been mobilization in the strict technical sense of the word: the whole point was that there had been a gradual concentration of many divisions within striking distance of the Bohemian border. Hitler's annoyance, then and now, is to be ascribed to the fact that Czech military authorities were forewarned in time and forestalled German activity by calling to the colours a portion of the Czechoslovak army: in his version, this was an invented fable, 'intended as an excuse for Czech mobilization'. The at first sight undue importance attached to this whole incident may well find its explanation at the next crisis over Danzig, when again there will at first be no mobilization, but only a gradual concentration of troops, in preparation for some lightning stroke which will overbear Polish



resistance and forestall the possibility of war. We must constantly bear in mind the fact of which Herr Hitler reminded us in another part of the speech, that he had made up his mind on 28 May to 'solve' the Czech question by 2 October, and had at once started the new Siegfried line as a preparation to that end. The animosity which he is now known to cherish towards Mr. Chamberlain is plausibly explained by the feeling that the abject surrender of Munich forced him to take two bites to the Czech cherry, instead of swallowing it whole in September, and thus put him to the necessity of six months' more manœuvring before it again came within reach of his mouth.

Even more striking is the speaker's constant effort to represent Germany as the injured party, still on the defensive against such rapacious aggressors as the Czechs, and entitled to regard the Treaty of Versailles as so infamous in every particular as to absolve him from observance and to justify unilateral action. Yet his assertion that Germany was not beaten in the field but only surrendered in 1918 on the basis of President Wilson's Fourteen Points is patently and demonstrably false: and indeed it should suffice to point out that throughout the critical spring and summer of that year the German Government would have none of them, though doubtless their disruptive force upon public opinion in Germany, and still more Austria-Hungary, can hardly be exaggerated. Moreover, Herr Hitler, of all men, is specially precluded from quoting the Fourteen Points, for their twin foundations, democracy and pacifism—on which Wilson explicitly stated that all else must stand or fall—are anathema to the Fuhrer. Incidentally, the Polish settlement, for whose modification he clamours, corresponds almost exactly to one of these very points, and the special

status of Danzig was carefully devised as a just compromise, in a case where German and Polish claims were hopelessly interlocked.

In any case, this harping upon Versailles is not convincing. Even if the Treaty were as scandalous as he would have us believe—and it is curious to note that the really indefensible sections of it, imposing impossible economic terms, are just those to which he attaches least importance—there remain to-day only a few sorry fragments of the treaty which he has not repudiated with entire impunity. His attitude resembles that of Mr. de Valera, still dwelling upon the misdeeds of Strongbow or Cromwell, years after the last feeble link between England and Ireland has been allowed to snap.

The Führer's claim to have always given 'full and frank' statements of his policy, is best answered in the words of the *Daily Telegraph*, which reminded him that 'down to January 1937 all he ever claimed was "equality": yet a year later he came forward with "self-determination", and when that had been satisfied, we began to hear in March 1939 of "living space", the "millennial association" of Czech and German, "self-preservation" and what not. Where is the "full and frank" statement of his policy in all these declarations, in which satisfaction of each claim merely proved the stepping-stone to the next?'

Most ominous of all, however, was his renewed claim to repudiate international agreements by unilateral action—and this time not merely sections of Versailles, on the more than doubtful plea that they had been rendered invalid by the non-fulfilment of other clauses, but two Agreements which he had of his own free will concluded with Britain and with Poland, and which were valid for specified periods of time. And this by

lightning decision, without previous notification, and by his own autocratic will and interpretation. In the one case the decision is based on the arbitrary and quite false assumption that 'England to-day, both in the Press and officially, upholds the view that Germany should be opposed under all circumstances': in the other, out of pique at the suggestion of a German intention to attack, which he denounces as 'merely invented by the international Press'.

### *Strategic Encirclement*

The Reichstag speech brought even those who still clung to the tattered rags of appeasement face to face with grim realities. A long succession of weak surrenders and ineffective protests had been condoned so long as the scene of aggression was in remote Manchuria or Abyssinia: but now the forces of evil were pursuing a policy of openly avowed conquest in Central Europe. Loudly proclaiming, for the benefit of those incapable of reading the facts of the European map, their own encirclement by the wicked democracies, Germany and Italy were themselves following an elaborate plan of strategic encirclement, applied in the centre of the Continent by the inclusion of the Bohemian Protectorate and a vassal Slovakia within the German 'living space'; in the West by large scale military operations in Spain, intended to confront France with the need for defending a third front: in the East by pushing out fresh tentacles round Poland (through Memelland towards the Baltic States, through Slovakia towards Eastern Galicia); in the South-east by placing Yugoslavia in pincers between the Slovene border and the Albanian highlands. The victory of General Franco over the Second Spanish Republic increased their arrogance, and the full extent of their

assistance—so fiercely denied when a mere corner of the veil was partially lifted before the Non-Intervention Committee—was now exultantly proclaimed upon the house-tops, as a further proof that they defied every law and prescription of international decency.

### *Conscription*

It was in these circumstances that the British Government decided to prove the reality of its conversion to a saner policy by introducing, for the first time in our history, a measure of conscription in peace-time. It is true that the manner in which it was introduced, and the neglect to consult the Opposition leaders, was deplorably maladroit, but the rapidity with which captious criticism collapsed, and the readiness with which both the country at large and the young men most affected, accepted this tremendous innovation, serve as a measure of the national emergency and of the sure instinct which the British nation has always shown in moments of acute danger. It was easy enough to remind the Prime Minister that both Mr. Baldwin in April 1936 and he himself in February 1938 had pledged themselves not to introduce conscription 'so long as peace prevails': and that when the Territorial Force was doubled earlier in the year, he still expressed the Government's opinion that 'we shall demonstrate the possibilities of voluntary services to meet all our needs'. These three statements were obviously irreconcilable with the measure of conscription now proposed: yet it was no less obviously mere factiousness to accuse the Prime Minister of breaking his word. More just would have been the criticism that he took six weeks after the Prague *coup* and a month after the seizure of Albania, to realize that the Munich policy was in ruins, and that Prague and Tirana were mere

signposts on the roads to Warsaw and Kiev, to Budapest, Belgrade and Salonica. Under the unique conditions of our time, which recall the period of the French invasions of Holland, Switzerland and the Papal States, Mr. Chamberlain was fully entitled to tell the House, 'Since then I have changed my mind', and to say that he was 'as particular about keeping my word' as most of his fellow-members. He quoted with just approval a phrase of the *Financial News*, describing the present as 'a wholly abnormal period to which neither peace-time nor war-time financial canons applied'. He had to admit that doubt had in the past been cast on our determination. 'It has become clearer and clearer to us that the success of our whole effort to build up a solid front against this idea of domination by force was being jeopardized by these doubts.' 'We cannot but be impressed,' he added, 'with the view shared by other democratic countries, and especially by our friends in Europe, that despite the immense efforts this country has already made by way of re-armament, nothing would so impress the world with the determination of this country to offer a firm resistance to any attempt at general domination, as its acceptance of compulsory military service, which is the general rule of the Continent.' Critics were fully entitled to demand a parallel conscription of wealth, restriction of armament profits and co-ordination of effort through a Ministry of Supply, and to complain of the grudging and incomplete manner in which these demands were met by the Government. But nothing could alter the essential needs of the situation, and already on 8 May the House of Commons passed the second reading of the Military Training Bill by 287 to 145 votes, and its remaining stages were hurried into law under a time limit.

*The Axis Alliance*

On 7 May yet another lingering illusion was finally disposed of by the conclusion of a political and military pact between the two Axis Powers, and the ceremonial reception accorded on this occasion to Herr von Ribbentrop at Milan. Both in Rome and in Berlin it was presented as not merely a proof of solidarity 'rigid and entire', based on the knowledge that 'the defeat of the one would mean catastrophe to the other', but, in the words of the *Messaggero*, as an answer to the 'implacable and feverish encirclement' planned by London and Paris. Almost in the same breath the paper depicts the menace of an offensive bloc as necessitating counter-measures, and reassures its readers as to 'the real weight of the new alliance', which it estimates at 150 million people.<sup>1</sup> In the same way Signor Gayda, the Duce's official spokesman, presented the alliance as an attempt to restore the balance of power against the imperialist democracies. Perhaps the most illuminating German comment was that of the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, which argued that the democracies could only understand the severe and laconic language of military alliances. Italy had now definitely abandoned all idea of returning to her alliance of 1915-19, and her new alignment meant joint insistence upon Germany's 'living space' in Central Europe and Italy's living space in the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. Most instructive of all was an article of vulgar abuse published by Herr von Ribbentrop in the Duce's own paper, *Popolo*

<sup>1</sup> In his Turin speech of 14 May, the Duce himself spoke of 'the formidable bloc of 150,000,000 souls which was rapidly increasing and which stretched from the Baltic to the Indian Ocean'. The meaning of this is not clear, for Germany only numbered 70 millions (plus 10 million vassals in Bohemia and Slovakia) and Italy 42 millions. The Duce is presumably including the population of Libya and Abyssinia.

*d'Italia*: 'I am convinced that Italy and Germany could not have given a better reply to what the Duce calls those half-baked degenerate democrats who are always afraid of aggression and see an aggressor in every one. . . . There is nothing new in our military alliance, but for those half-baked, pettifogging and carping journalists it is just as well that the i's should be dotted, so that they may know what our real relations are, and also that their lies carry no further weight.'

The actual text of the Treaty was published on 22 May and included an explicit pledge of unrestricted military support on land, on sea and in the air, in the event of 'one of them becoming involved in warlike complications with another Power'. In other words it was an offensive no less than defensive alliance, valid for ten years, and Signor Gayda at once set himself to make the world's flesh creep by dark hints of secret annexes to the Treaty, providing for action 'according to a single plan'. In reality he only served to underline the fact that Italy is bound hand and foot to Germany, and that the small group whose influence is predominant with the Duce—consisting of Count Ciano and Signori Alfieri, Starace and Farinacci—is openly and unreservedly Germanophil.

### *Poland and Germany*

After the destruction of Czechoslovakia it at once became obvious that Poland occupied the most exposed position in Eastern Europe, and that short of direct Russian intervention the main obstacle to German expansion lay in Warsaw. It was this knowledge that prompted the Anglo-French guarantee to Poland, which would have been so infinitely more effective if Czechoslovakia had not been subjected to sabotage and

extinction: and it was of course annoyance at this belated defensive action which prompted Herr Hitler to denounce the German-Polish Pact of 1934.

By placing Danzig in the forefront of his revised demands, the Führer laid renewed emphasis upon the strategic side of the question. If, to quote Lord Lothian, 'every one here and in the United States now recognizes that the demand for the incorporation of the Sudetenland in the Third Reich was only a stalking horse for a larger objective',<sup>1</sup> this is even more obvious in the case of Danzig. All serious students of the Czech problem had always been aware that the Republic, once deprived of the natural frontiers of the Bohemian Crown, would no longer be *viable*. But it required the object lesson of 15 March to demonstrate to the plain man Czechoslovakia's utter defencelessness under the so-called 'Munich settlement', and to convince him that in Prague and Vienna Germany had acquired two of the strongest strategic bastions in Europe. It was, however, possible to argue to the very last that the German minority in Bohemia had certain rights and grievances, and that self-determination involved their union with the Reich. No such arguments applied to Danzig, which had been assigned the status of a Free City, under the control of the League, and enjoyed complete self-government on purely German lines. The solitary right which Poland denies to the Free City is the right to place itself, and with it the whole of Poland, at the mercy of the Reich. For it is not merely that Danzig has been linked with Poland for centuries and drawn its very life-blood from the Polish connexion, but once in hostile hands it would become a dagger aimed at Poland's vitals. The 'Polish Corridor' is a convenient but deliberately misleading propagandist

<sup>1</sup> *Observer*, 26 February 1939.



catchword. It is not a corridor at all. It is the valley of the Vistula, Poland's main river and her only sure and direct link with the sea. It may without exaggeration be called the jugular vein of Poland, and the present rulers of Germany are merely applying the precepts laid down by Frederick the Great in seeking to acquire a position which would give them strategic control of the whole Baltic. Annex Danzig to the Reich, and the port of Gdynia is within range of its guns, the river is closed and a rival 'Corridor', linking East Prussia with the bulk of the Reich, becomes an impenetrable bar across Poland's only contacts with the western world.

These facts belong to the political alphabet of every Pole, and were closely reflected in official Polish pronouncements and in the speech of the Foreign Minister, Colonel Beck, before the Sejm on 5 May. Poland, it was pointed out, in no way interfered with 'the natural, ideological and cultural development' of the Free City, but was entitled to control this key position on the Baltic, the more so since its whole economic existence was bound up, now as ever, with its Polish hinterland. The charge that Poland's arrangement with the Western Powers was an infringement of the German-Polish Treaty was effectually met by the rejoinder that in 1934 both sides had reserved the right to conclude agreements with other States, and that Germany herself had actually done so. Moreover, it became apparent that Germany had been trying to dictate a unilateral revision of the treaty, when Colonel Beck revealed that as late as 26 March he had suggested to Berlin a joint guarantee of the Free City by Germany and Poland, but that neither to this nor to a later overture through the German Ambassador had Berlin even deigned to answer, and that the Führer had

publicly repudiated the Treaty without any previous consultation or notification to Warsaw. It also transpired that the relevant passages in the Reichstag speech were the first that Warsaw had ever heard of Herr Hitler's alleged offer of a twenty-five-year guarantee of Poland and a triple guarantee of Slovak independence. Colonel Beck's speech was firm, *documenté* and moderate. He made it clear that Poland 'will not let herself be barred from the Baltic' and will not surrender Pomorze (the true name of the so-called 'corridor'); while peaceful in intention and eager for peaceful negotiations, he declared that 'peace, like almost all things in this world, has its price, high and definable. We in Poland do not know the conception of peace at any price.'

Only the day before, in a leading article which dealt a grave blow at Britain's reviving prestige in Europe, *The Times* suggested that 'Danzig is really not worth a war'. As Mr. Voigt pointed out, this is like saying that 'the balance of power is not worth fighting for'. No one in his senses would suggest that Danzig *in itself* is worth a world war, but what is to be thought of the perspicacity of a journal which deliberately poses the question on such radically false lines? The issue can hardly be summed up more succinctly than in the words of Mr. Mark Patrick in a letter to that journal: 'Last September some people warned us against "fighting for Czechoslovakia" and to-day they tell us to beware of "dying for Danzig"'. With precisely equal logic they might have reproached the Duke of Wellington for fighting for the indifferent agricultural land round Waterloo, or have blamed Sir John French for losing tens of thousands of men in defence of a second-rate market town like Ypres.' And if the reader wishes to probe deeper into the issues involved in Danzig, he will turn to Herr Hitler's

favourite hero Frederick the Great, and will ascertain what made him assert that 'he who holds Danzig holds Poland', and why his seizure of the city paved the way to Polish partition. He will then realize that the Fuhrer's outlook upon Poland is no more benevolent than his outlook upon Czechoslovakia, and that it is not a British interest that he should effect the same stranglehold over Poland's 34 millions as over Bohemia's 10 millions.

Similar defeatist trends in France led to strong reaction on the part of M. Daladier. 'It would appear that in France as well as abroad attempts are being made, by inexact news and tendentious comments, to travesty the facts and either to weaken the resolution of the Government and nation, or to create abroad doubts about the clarity and integrity of French policy. No protest could be strong enough against such distortion of the truth.' This public rebuke was followed on 11 May by a speech in the Chamber which breathed a calm confidence, coupling the belief that war settles nothing with the resolve to shrink from no sacrifice in the cause of France and democracy. He stressed the ever-growing co-operation of France and Britain, their 'spontaneous and unilateral guarantee' to menaced countries in the east of Europe, addressed special compliments to Turkey after the recent visit of General Weygand, and laid great stress on the participation of Soviet Russia 'in this common work of mutual assistance'. On the same day Mr. Chamberlain quoted M. Blum as saying that the only real danger of war lay in the impression that Britain and France were not in earnest and could not be relied upon to carry out their promises. 'No more deadly mistake could be made.' The Danzig dispute could, in his opinion, quite well be settled amicably between

Poland and Germany, but 'if an attempt were made to change the situation by force in such a way as to threaten Polish independence, that would inevitably start a general conflagration, in which this country would be involved'. *The Times* was justified in describing this as one of the Prime Minister's most important utterances, since for the first time he used that kind of unambiguous and vigorous phrase which alone is likely to impress the Dictatorial mind.

### *Turkey in the Peace Front*

Two days later, on 13 May, it was for the first time given to the democracies to spring a march upon their opponents, and unduly optimistic observers jumped to the rash conclusion that they were recovering their lost initiative in Europe. Pending 'a long-term agreement', Mr. Chamberlain was able to announce that Britain and Turkey had agreed upon a Pact of Mutual Assistance, to come into immediate operation 'in the event of aggression leading to war in the Mediterranean area'. They also recognized the need for 'the establishment of security in the Balkans', and were consulting together for this purpose. The Turkish Premier, M. Saydum, in making a parallel announcement to an unanimous Assembly, explained that his original intention had been to uphold Turkish neutrality, but that recent events in the Balkan Peninsula had rendered this impossible, and 'the question of security in the Eastern Mediterranean' had been raised in a manner that directly affected Turkey's vital interests. It was very noticeable that almost in the same breath the Premier spoke of Anglo-Turkish and Turko-Russian relations, as in effect the two pillars of Turkish policy, and pointedly alluded to the important results attained during the recent visit to Angora of M. Potemkin, Deputy Foreign

Commissar. The late Ambassador in London, M. Fethi Okyar, one of Ataturk's most trusted statesmen, spoke even more frankly about the earthquake which had 'shaken the foundations of peace and security' and wiped a small Balkan State off the map in twenty-four hours. This breach of faith was the work of a Great Power which already possessed islands close to Turkey's shores and had concentrated war material there, 'under our very noses'. But Anglo-Turkish co-operation should suffice to repel every danger. Inspired Press comment at Angora and Constantinople declined to accept the theory of 'living space', least of all as applied by a Great Power to the Balkan Peninsula. The Pact was also warmly welcomed by the Soviet Press, as a further link in that chain which 'is the only sure means of preventing aggression spreading to new parts of Europe'. The emphasis laid in Moscow upon Turko-Russian friendship was an indirect but welcome sign that for once in a way Moscow approved wholeheartedly the action of London. Meanwhile parallel negotiations went on between Turkey and France, who eased the situation by an arrangement for the transfer to Turkish sovereignty of the vilayet of Alexandretta, till now part of France's Syrian mandate. This is certainly the most objectionable feature of an otherwise highly desirable arrangement, for it was concluded by direct negotiations between Paris and Angora, instead of being conducted through the League, from which the original mandate derived.

There is but little attempt made to conceal the direction of Turkish apprehension. In the first place, despite the drastic religious changes effected in Turkey, there is a natural affinity between the Turks and the last independent Moslem community in Europe. Secondly, Turkey is fully aware that the attack on

Albania is a first step towards dissolution of the Balkan League, and the reduction of Yugoslavia to vassalage. Above all, a sure instinct warns the Turks that the ultimate objective of the Axis is the control of the Straits, which would of course involve domination in the whole Eastern Mediterranean and a reversion to the old Berlin-Baghdad designs. On the other hand, the attention paid to Turkey is due above all to her strategic position as the major partner both in the Balkan League and in the Middle Eastern Pact with Iraq, Persia and Afghanistan, as the natural bridge towards a resumption of normal relations between Russia and Britain, and as a Power whose land and sea interests coincide with those of Britain throughout the Near East and who is able to implement her promises, thanks to her martial character and to the remarkable reorganization of the Turkish State under Kemal Ataturk. Nor does there seem anything irreconcilable between the Pact and the Montreux Convention of 1936 regulating the status of the Straits.

German diplomacy was for once taken entirely by surprise, and the official Press voiced its keen annoyance at Turkey, an ally in the Great War, having abandoned the path of neutrality and becoming the vassal of British aggression. The *Diplomatisch-politische Korrespondenz* assumed that Britain would now be able to use all Turkish harbours, and in particular the Dardanelles, as a base of operations, and deduced from this that the alliance was directed against Germany, since she would automatically be involved in any war in which Italy was engaged. It is not too much to assert that the Pact weakened Italy's strategic position in the Mediterranean, and in the very direction where Germany could be of least assistance: but its full efficacy, in the eyes of Europe and in actual fact lay

in the prospect of a 'Grand Alliance for Peace', to use Mr. Churchill's phrase, and of this the most essential feature was an agreement between London and Moscow for which public opinion waited with increasing impatience. Mr. Litvinov's phrase, 'the indivisibility of peace', was being justified by events.

### *Towards a Russian Alliance*

Mr. Churchill recently quoted in the House of Commons the warning addressed by a high German functionary to the Fuhrer: 'You will know that Britain is in earnest on the day that the British working-class accepts conscription and the Conservative party agrees to an alliance with Russia.' This double miracle is the work of Adolf Hitler. It need, however, cause no surprise that such an alliance should have proved so hard to achieve even after both sides had publicly declared it to be desirable. For twenty years Russia has been hermetically sealed from Europe, and even since she has adopted a policy of adhesion to the League and has loyally observed the Covenant, contacts between her leading personalities and those of the West have been almost non-existent (M. Litvinov forming the one notable exception). British opinion, rightly disgusted by the drastic purges in Russian public life, was slow to realize that they were the direct result of a reversal of Russian foreign policy, and that the function of Litvinov, as the exponent of Stalin's will, was no longer to promote World-Revolution by subversive propaganda, but to secure the necessary time for the Soviet experiment at home, by peaceful co-operation. That Stalin the realist based this policy not so much on high principle as on a belief that the material interests of Russia and the democracies coincided, was a clear indication that this co-operation

offered a good prospect of success. Unhappily Moscow's already profound suspicions were deepened by the deplorable weakness—which it interpreted as cynicism and bad faith—of the Western Powers in a whole series of issues at Geneva—Manchukuo (where Russian interests in the Far East increased the tendency towards suspicion), Abyssinia, Spain and Austria. After the Anschluss Russia had at once proposed a six-Power Conference, but the British Government did not respond, the Powers were left talking and Austria's absorption was accepted by Europe.<sup>1</sup>

During the summer of 1938 Russia found herself consistently held at arm's-length by Mr. Chamberlain: she was not consulted about the Runciman mission or the massing of German troops: her readiness to assist the Czechs against an unprovoked attack was not looked upon with favour: official circles in the West eagerly swallowed the persistent reports of Russian military unpreparedness put about from interested quarters:<sup>2</sup> and Litvinov's concrete proposals for a joint *démarche* early in September were left without response. Russia was deliberately excluded from all negotiations, and the basic feature of the Munich 'Settlement' was Mr. Chamberlain's acceptance of Hitler's demand for the exclusion of Russia from the European concert and a tacit recognition that Eastern Europe lay specifically within his sphere of interest. This attempt to reverse the long process by which Russia had asserted, first a definite protectorate, and later a predominant influence, in the Near East, was obviously something which Russia could not possibly tolerate.

During last winter the Soviet Government, angry and

<sup>1</sup> See *supra*, pp. 91-4.

<sup>2</sup> It is of extreme importance to note that German expert opinion, as expressed in military journals and articles, has consistently avoided depreciation of the Soviet military machine.



increasingly cynical, took the line that it could better afford to wait than any of its rivals, that 'Munich' was from the first day doomed to failure, that Hitler, with his gift for combining *panaches* with 'cheap laurels',<sup>1</sup> would not take the risk of that attack upon the Ukraine which formed the substance of so many prophecies, and that ere long Russia would be more wooed than ever before, and would then hold most of the trumps.

Thus the events of March 1939 were regarded in Moscow without surprise, but also with no slight *Schadenfreude*: and when the British Government on 18 March inquired what Russia would do if Roumania were attacked, Moscow renewed its suggestion of the previous year for a six-Power Conference. In London this was considered 'premature', and counter-proposals were made for a quadruple declaration against aggression by Britain, France, Russia and Poland. Russia, though regarding this as inadequate, was ready to sign, but Poland did not respond: and when the British Government, having meanwhile decided upon guarantees to Poland and Roumania, invited Moscow to make a similar declaration it refused, on the very obscure ground that the obligation would not be 'reciprocal'.<sup>2</sup>

On the very eve of the Prague *coup* Stalin had delivered a lengthy pronouncement to the Communist Congress in Moscow, in which he very rightly contended that the world was witnessing 'a war waged by the three aggressor States, and a redivision of world spheres of interest, at the expense of non-aggressive States, without so much as an attempt at resistance and even with a certain amount of connivance, on their part'. This, he said, was due partly to fear of revolution in

<sup>1</sup> A phrase used by one of Hitler's closest associates to define his essential aims

<sup>2</sup> See Mr. Chamberlain's speech in the House of Commons, 19 May.

the event of war, but still more to a rejection of the policy of 'collective security' in favour of 'non-intervention', in the hope that the three aggressors would embroil themselves in wars, 'especially if possible with the Soviet Union', and emerge in an exhausted state. It almost looked as though the attention devoted in the foreign Press to alleged German designs upon the Ukraine were intended to turn Germany eastwards and provoke a Russo-German war: there was corresponding disappointment when the Germans suddenly seemed to be turning West and demanding colonies. 'One might think that the Germans were given Czechoslovakia as a prize for a promise to begin war against the Soviet Union, but then refused to meet the bill.' This passage is of great importance, as an indication of the suspicions passing through the mind of Stalin, isolated in the Kremlin to an even greater extent than Hitler in his Alpine retreat. Stalin summed up Russian policy as peace and closer business relations with all countries which respect the integrity of the Russian frontiers, and support of those nations which are victims of aggression and are fighting for independence. Russia would deal 'two blows for one', would strengthen to the utmost her military and naval power, and would not play the game of warmongers who wished her to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them.

The protest addressed by Moscow to Germany after her seizure of Prague was much stronger and more concrete than that of any other country, and deserves special attention. It bluntly challenged the 'historical and political grounds' advanced in justification; it denied that Czechoslovakia could be described as 'a source of instability and unrest'; it challenged the legality of President Hacha's action in signing away

his country's independence; it pointed out that the principle of self-determination so often quoted by Nazi Germany had been completely ignored both in Bohemia and Slovakia; that the occupation was therefore 'arbitrary, violent and aggressive', that Germany had encouraged Hungary to violate Ruthene 'elementary rights'; and, in short, that the German action was a breach of international law, a blow to political stability and a danger to world peace. It is to be regretted that other Governments, which, unlike the Soviet Government, were morally responsible for Czechoslovakia's destruction, lacked the courage or honesty to put these plain facts on record.

For some weeks inspired attacks upon Mr. Chamberlain were frequent in the Soviet Press, but as the radical change in British policy became apparent, and especially after the Prime Minister's speech of 12 April, these attacks abruptly ceased, though a tone of extreme reserve was maintained. On 15 April the first negotiations for a Pact began in Moscow, between M. Litvinov and Sir William Seeds, but from the outset they seemed to lack the necessary momentum, and the sudden fall of M. Litvinov, and the substitution, as Foreign Commissar, of M. Molotov, a man who speaks no foreign language, has never travelled abroad and is equally devoid of diplomatic experience and personal contacts, was hardly calculated to hasten agreement. This event caused a profound sensation throughout the world, and for a time there were sensational rumours of an impending understanding between Moscow and Berlin, rendered perhaps more plausible by the Fuhrer's marked abstention, in his Reichstag speech, from the usual scurrilities about Russia. Ere long, however, it became clear that this theory was far too alarmist, and that Stalin's dismissal

of Litvinov (whose health had latterly begun to fail) was, above all, his blunt way of recognizing that the League policy for which Litvinov stood had for the present failed, and that other methods must be adopted.<sup>1</sup> Negotiations were therefore resumed, Lord Halifax's relations with the Soviet Ambassador in London, Mr. Maisky, grew markedly more cordial, and on 19 May, Mr. Chamberlain, during a fresh debate on foreign policy, made remarks about Soviet Russia which, coming from him, deserve the name of cordial. Referring to Russian co-operation, he said, 'We want it, we attach value to it. The suggestion that we despise the assistance of the Soviet Union is really without foundation': and he then expressly associated himself with Stalin's policy of 'defending victims of aggression, provided they were prepared to defend their independence'. As usual, Mr. Churchill—this time with valiant support from Mr. Lloyd George—reinforced the arguments for a Russian Pact, only attainable if Russia were treated in every way as an equal. None of the States in Eastern Europe could maintain themselves for, say, a year's war, unless they had behind them 'the massive and solid backing of a friendly Russia joined in combination with the Western Powers'.

It is obviously impossible within the framework of the present volume, to give a detailed account of these complex negotiations; and it would doubtless not be in the public interest that the full facts should be revealed. It would be most unfair to suggest that the whole blame for seemingly interminable delays rests on one

<sup>1</sup> It is quite possible that he also found it convenient to throw over the last Jew holding a key position in the Soviet Union, and thus deprive his enemies of a cheap argument. But against this speaks his notorious contempt for outside opinion.

side alone: and it has been aptly pointed out that even such well-prepared instruments as the Anglo-French Convention of 1904, or as Mr. Balfour's Naval Agreement with America, took several months to negotiate. Here it must suffice to state that by the end of May the Soviet demand for a military alliance had been accepted unreservedly by Britain; that fresh delays and misunderstanding arose over the question of reciprocity of obligation, Britain hesitating to guarantee the Baltic States in face of their own expressed dislike of any such guarantee, while Russia made difficulties in the matter of Holland and Switzerland. (On 12 June, Mr. Strang, one of the ablest of our Foreign Office officials, was sent out to Moscow with detailed supplementary instructions, but the difficulty of distinguishing clearly between 'direct' and 'indirect' aggression led to something like a deadlock in July, and even the announcement that high military and naval experts were being sent to discuss technical questions of defence with the Russian General Staff, did not avail to produce a final settlement before Parliament rose on 3 August. It had, however, become clear that all sections of British opinion, from Left to Right, favoured a Russian alliance, with all its consequences, and was increasingly impatient at the delay: and on the other hand that, whether this delay was due to hard bargaining, arrogance or mere stickiness and lack of imagination, neither side had any intention of allowing the negotiations to fail. Mr. Molotov's speech of 31 May at the Kremlin made it only too clear that the new Russia is highly susceptible in matters of prestige, and only too prone to show her strength in negotiation: but it would be mere folly to overlook that other vital factor in the situation, a profound distrust of Mr. Chamberlain's personality, and the fear lest he may be using

talks with Moscow as a lever to secure better terms from Germany. The ever-recurring rumours of 'appeasement' and of a 'Polish Munich' in the British Press are sure signs that in our own country the same distrust is rampant, not merely among devotees to this party or to that, but above all among those who desire a real, not a sham, 'National Government'.

### *The Dictators and Spain*

While these negotiations dragged wearily on, and the German Staff speculated on the prospects of a war on two fronts, a certain lull occurred in Central Europe, similar to the state of coma to which the boa constrictor is reduced during the early stages of digesting its prey, and before a new victim has been selected. Two incidents from this period deserve a brief attention, as showing the extent to which, in the minds of the Dictators, strategy took precedence over ideology or racial feeling.

Early in June the Fuhrer addressed nearly 20,000 men of the 'Condor Legion', who had fought for General Franco, and revealed the fact that already in July 1936, 'in full collaboration with Mussolini', he decided to help Franco's rebellion 'as much and as long as the rest of the world supported the internal enemies of Spain': he did this partly to protect Germany 'against a similar catastrophe', and also from sympathy with a country which, 'despite all England's black-mailing efforts', remained neutral and Germanophil in the Great War. Before the end of that month the first German military technicians, dressed as civilian tourists, left Hamburg for Cadiz, while 20 Junker machines were simultaneously sent to transport 15,000 Moorish troops and the Foreign Legion from Morocco to Spain. Then followed flights of fighting planes,

anti-aircraft guns and tank companies, and in November the Condor Legion was systematically organized under General Sperrle, commander of the Munich air district. The Führer gloated over the formidable details of this assistance, regretting the painful necessity of 'remaining silent year after year about your struggle'. But nothing succeeds like success, and there was no further need for concealment. Similar boasting on the part of Italy accompanied the visit of Señor Suñer, the Spanish Minister of the Interior, to Italy: and it was revealed that during the four months from December 1936 to April 1937, 100,000 men, 4,370 motor vehicles, 40,000 tons of war material and 750 guns were transported to Spain, while 149 Italian naval units were also engaged in the Spanish civil war.<sup>1</sup> Count Ciano was in one respect more cautious than the Führer, for he claimed that Italy's action was a reply to 'foreign', meaning French and Russian, intervention in Spain, and that the first Italian 'volunteers' arrived at Cadiz on 22 December 1936: but he admitted that the first of the Italian planes left for Morocco on the same day (25 July 1936) as 25 planes 'took off from Marseilles, destined for Red Spain.'<sup>2</sup>

This whole incident, when compared with the loud and indignant denials of the German and Italian representatives on the Non-Intervention Committee and the denunciation by the Goebbels Press of concrete

<sup>1</sup> *Forze Armate* (a military review) quoted by the *Bulletin of International News*, No. 12 (17 June).

<sup>2</sup> This throws a singular light upon the state of information in this country about the Spanish campaign. Friends of the Nationalists indignantly denied the suggestion of even 10-20,000 foreign troops, much more of 100,000. And was our Intelligence Service entirely misled, or was its information, as in the Czech case, ignored because it did not suit the colour-blind policy pursued at the Non-Intervention Committee?

stories as 'impudent lies', is not merely a revelation of the perfidy of the Dictators, but shows that they have become so self-confident that they think it unnecessary to dissimulate any longer as to their methods and their aims. The idea that any lasting bargain can be concluded with such men, save by convincing them that overwhelming material force is on the other side, is simply childish; and yet we have our political dotards in Parliament, in the City and in the Press, who fly periodical *ballons d'essai* to that effect.

### *The Betrayal of South Tirol*

The second incident relates to the sudden announcement early in July that transfer of the German population of South Tirol had been negotiated by agreement between Rome and Berlin.<sup>1</sup> At first it was denied by the German Foreign Office as 'unlikely and fanciful', and then came an official Italian assurance that there was to be 'a quiet and completely voluntary exodus'. But within a week it could no longer be denied that something far more substantial was contemplated. In the first instance all foreigners resident in the district were ordered to leave within 48 hours, and this measure was described as of 'a political and military character'. The Swiss Government pointed out that this was a flagrant violation of the Italo-Swiss Convention, but this protest, and the representations made by Britain, France and Holland, remained entirely without effect.

It soon transpired that former Austrian residents who did not adopt Italian citizenship in 1919 (and who therefore became German citizens after the Anschluss) were to be transferred without delay, and that it would then be the turn first of Germans of the Reich resident

<sup>1</sup> For a useful survey see *Bulletin of International News*, No. 15 (29 July 1938).



in Tirol, and finally of all persons of German race and language who had become naturalized in Italy since 1919. That the presence of foreign eyewitnesses would be in every way undesirable during the process of dragooning and uprooting one of the most ancient, famous and characteristically German tribes from its ancestral home, is natural enough. That the Duce should be bent on completing a policy of denationalization on which he publicly embarked as long ago as 1926, and which aimed at making the Brenner the northern boundary of the Italian race, is a policy not any the less comprehensible because it directly violates the pledges freely given to the Germans of Tirol when they became her subjects. But nothing can excuse the cynical indifference of the Fuhrer to the fate of the one German minority in Europe whose racial boundaries can be reconciled with strategic requirements.<sup>1</sup>

Hitler's treatment of the Tirolese marks his final abandonment of racial self-determination. After Munich it would have been logical to exchange the remnant of the German population in Czechoslovakia for some of the much larger Czech population of the annexed Sudetenland: but Hitler adopted exactly the opposite tactics, discouraging Germans from leaving Prague or Brno, and ordering the Sudeten German students to study not in the Reich, but at the now superfluous German University of Prague—thereby showing that he did not wish to disentangle the races, but to use everywhere the German minorities as spearheads of German influence and even of Germanization. In the same way the negligible German minority in

<sup>1</sup> The purely Italian Trentino was a strategic thorn in the flesh of Italy so long as Austria held it, and was rightly handed over to Italy. But the racial 'divide' is at the Salurn gorge, good as the Brenner.

Slovakia was assigned a key position in the new vassal Republic.

But if the Tirolese minority can be arbitrarily transferred, so can other minorities; and Lord Clydesdale was justified in inviting the House of Commons to consider means for the exchange of the Germans of Danzig with the Poles of Silesia.

Danzig is infinitely more necessary to Poland than Tirol to Italy. Just as the Führer has abandoned one of his basic principles of policy by annexing millions of unwilling Czechs and reducing the Slovaks to vassalage, so he has, by his betrayal of Tirol, renounced his claim to moral leadership of the entire German race. He now stands unmasked, as champion of the view that political and strategic aims take precedence over racial and historic rights.

### *Lord Halifax on British Policy*

In the two months and a half following the Prague outrage there had been a long series of official British pronouncements, as a rule directed to specific needs of the moment, and rarely covering the whole orbit of policy. At last it was decided that at the annual dinner of Chatham House (29 June) the Foreign Secretary, in the name of the whole Government, should make a statement of policy sufficiently outspoken and comprehensive to deprive foreign critics of any real excuse for misjudging British intentions in the near future; and the relief and unanimous applause which greeted it in the country was the measure of its belatedness.

Lord Halifax, whose whole speech had the clear resonance of a bell, went straight to the point by stressing the great changes of the past twelve months and the new commitments which Britain had been forced to undertake, in the knowledge that with the

'security and independence of other countries' our own was intimately bound up. Britain had 'always stood out against any attempt by any single Power to dominate Europe at the expense of the liberties of other nations', and he believed that the nation was as united in that sense as ever in the past, despite the sacrifices which such a policy involved. We had 'an unchallengeable Navy', an Air Force which now had 'nothing to fear from any other', an Army, small and 'once derided', but gaining momentum with every week. 'None of this formidable array will be called into play except in defence against aggression: no blow will be struck, no shot fired': but in the event of 'further aggression', we are resolved at once to use the whole of our strength in fulfilment of our pledges to resist it'.

He went on to speak of 'provocative insults' and misrepresentation directed against the British democracy, adding, 'I can say at once that Britain is not prepared to yield either to calumnies or force. It may afford some satisfaction to those who have pronounced our nation to be decadent, to learn that they themselves have found the cure. Every insult offered to our people, every rude challenge made to what we value . . . only unites us, increases our determination and strengthens our loyalty to those others who share our feelings and aspirations.' He felt the moment had come to 're-state our aims boldly, and with such plainness of speech as I can command'.

'Our first resolve is to stop aggression.' What were the facts about the alleged 'encirclement' of Germany and Italy? 'Germany is isolating herself, and doing it most successfully and completely: she is isolating herself from other countries economically by her policy of autarchy, politically by a policy that causes constant anxiety to other nations, and culturally by her policy

of racialism . . . and it depends upon the German Government, and it alone, whether this process continues or not, for any day it can be ended by a policy of co-operation.' Again, the claim to *Lebensraum*, which faced every community, could not be solved 'simply by acquiring territory'. If it took the form of suppressing the independent existence of smaller and weaker neighbours, 'we reject it and must resist its application. Strangely enough, the claim to living space was advanced while Germany was importing thousands of workers from Italy, Holland, Czechoslovakia; was this over-population? And Belgium and Holland had proved that the problem could be met by "productive work", while all the wide spaces of the British Empire and the United States, could not save them from the distress due to the Great Slump.' Only world co-operation can solve the problems implied by the term *Lebensraum*. But 'the doctrine of force bars the way to settlement': if once it could be abandoned, 'all outstanding questions would be easier to solve'.

He had many wise things to say on the Colonial question, the mandatory system, the principle of trusteeship, Dominion status, and self-government as 'the ultimate goal of colonial policy': and in passing he pointed to the failure of the British attempt 'to hold Ireland, under the mistaken belief—to-day invoked to justify the subjection of Czechoslovakia—that it was indispensable to our national security. We have now realized that our safety is not diminished, but immeasurably increased, by a free and friendly Ireland.' A settlement of all problems of colonial administration, the mandatory principle and the Open Door, was perfectly attainable: but there could not be negotiation 'with a Government whose responsible statesmen

brand a friendly country as thieves and blackmailers and indulge in daily monstrous slanders on British policy in all parts of the world'. But the British Government were ready 'to pool their best thought with others in order to end the present state of political and economic insecurity', to consider 'how far the failure of the League was due to shortcomings in the Covenant itself', how international collaboration could be achieved, how machinery could be devised 'for bringing about peaceful change' in an ever-changing world. Once satisfy us 'that we all really wanted peaceful solutions, and (I say here definitely) we could in such a new atmosphere examine the colonial problem, the questions of raw materials and trade barriers, the issue of *Lebensraum*, the limitation of armaments, and any other issue that affects the lives of all European citizens'. But he must add, 'With all the strength at my command, so that nobody may misunderstand it', that 'the threat of military force is holding the world to ransom'. The motto '*suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*', was never better illustrated than when he took up the Führer's phrase, and insisted that the settlement 'must be upon some basis more substantial than verbal undertakings. It has been said that deeds, not words, are necessary. That also is our view.'

On this basis the new policy begins to assume coherent shape. A net refusal to negotiate on the basis of Power Politics, a readiness to risk even war for the prevention of a new world hegemony and for the restoration of an international order, and, in order to reach this goal, the establishment of a Peace Front with France, Russia, Poland, and the lesser Powers, in closest consultation with America—this is not 'encirclement' of Germany, but simply a refusal to allow Germany and her allies to seize one point of vantage after another,

until joint action against her becomes impossible. An Anglo-German accord must still remain the capital aim of British policy, the pivot round which the world's future turns. But it can never be achieved by an unholy bargain at the expense of others. The Powers which during four years of world-war proclaimed the liberation and defence of small nations as one of their foremost aims, cannot recognize the wanton suppression of independence and political liberties in States which had been members of the League and to whom we are solemnly pledged under the Covenant. Those who are still in doubt as to how far these obligations can be implemented in a situation in which the League machinery no longer functions, will do well to reflect on the extent to which the freedom and rights of small nations are bound up, to-day as in the past, with the most vital interests of the British Empire. Last September there were still many in Britain and France who in their heart of hearts hoped to purchase immunity for themselves by flinging a victim over the back of the sledge. But to-day the wolves are nearer and more ravening than ever; there is no obvious candidate for the role of victim, and no obvious means of achieving another Munich, save by open perjury: and there is also an increasing prospect that such methods, if applied, will fail again as lamentably as they failed before. Our only salvation lies in placing the moral issue first; it is because the nations ran away from it, that we are all in our present plight.

In the words of Lord Halifax, 'Not one of our engagements will ever function if there in fact exists nowhere any forcible disturber of the peace,' and Britain's foremost aim is 'to change the dangerous, threatening and sinister methods of arbitral force for the methods of negotiation and peaceful settlement'.

## EPILOGUE

(27 August, 1939)

EUROPE is a kaleidoscope, in perpetual movement, and it is impossible for the writer on contemporary affairs to keep abreast of events. Within a few weeks of the first publication of this book, the Bohemian and Albanian *coups* had transformed the whole situation, and while the third edition was still in the press, the German-Russian Agreement came as a fresh thunder-bolt, confounding the calculations of friend and foe alike. When war is in the balance and vast issues are at stake, it would be sheer folly to offer any cut and dried explanation; but it would be equally impossible to send this narrative to the press without attempting some sort of preliminary estimate of what has happened.

It is easy to see that the German-Russian Agreement<sup>1</sup> has destroyed, or at least corrected, values and shaken alignments in every part of the world; and some time must elapse before the new pattern takes clear shape. Whatever else remains in doubt, it would seem to have played havoc with the theory, so constantly advanced by the Nazi leaders (to a much lesser degree by the Fascists), that Europe is divided between two irreconcilable 'ideologies', and that the chief crime of the degenerate democracies of the West consists in their affinity with the foul and barbaric Bolshevik creed. Democracy, liberty and parliamentary government, we were told, led logically to Marxism and Bolshevism, and in the same breath, that both capitalism and Bolshevism were Jew-controlled. As recently as June the Führer and the Duce were boasting of their military exploits in Spain, and justifying them (as

General Franco's supporters in this country justified them) as a defence against Russian revolutionary aggression. Two years ago, on the other hand, Stalin shot eight of his most distinguished generals, because they were engaged in planning an alliance, military and economic, between Russia and Germany. And now Hitler, who has denounced the Soviet leaders as criminals and declared that they 'have no idea of forming an honourable alliance or of remaining true to it if they did',<sup>1</sup> has joined hands with Stalin, the author of the purge, in order to frustrate the inclusion of Russia in the 'Peace Front' which the Western Powers sought to establish. ‡

The motives of Germany are far clearer than those of Russia. Germany was bent upon wrecking at all costs this Peace Front, and we can only suppose that throughout the four months of Moscow negotiations between the Soviet Government and the Western Powers, she was engaged in secret counter-mining, in other words, that the final act was not a sudden improvisation, but the outcome of a carefully matured plan. It was of its very essence that it should be sudden and highly dramatic in character: for it was thus hoped to deal a knock-out blow at London and Paris, and to convince them that it was no longer possible to help Poland, and that she must be left to her fate. It is almost superfluous to point out that this insulting assumption, based upon inferences drawn from the Munich crisis of last autumn, left completely out of account the hardening of opinion both in Britain and in France—and in quite other ways, in America also—since the destruction of Czechoslovakia last March. Even the most complaisant and least reasoning have

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Mr. A. L. Kennedy in *The Times* of 25 August.



come to realize that the subordination of 'Self-determination' to '*Lebensraum*' marks a new departure in policy, that Sudetenland and Danzig were convenient watchwords to mask the far wider aim of conquest, first against Czechoslovakia, now against Poland, and if that succeeds, against Hungary, Roumania and all the Balkan States, and therefore that to yield again, as we yielded at Munich, would not avert further conflicts but increase already ravenous appetites and, after stripping us of our honour, leaves us in the end to fight under increasingly unfavourable circumstances.

The Government, in firmly pointing out that this Pact, however unwelcome and disturbing we might feel it to be, in no way affected our obligations towards Poland, which were freely undertaken before the Moscow talks began, has the unanimous approval of every shade of British opinion.

It is known that at the time of the Munich crisis Herr von Ribbentrop, in the teeth of military warnings, consistently adhered to the view that France and Britain would give way and leave Czechoslovakia to her fate. There seems to be little doubt that the German leaders have latterly assumed that in the Polish crisis Britain's reaction would be identical, and thereby have fatally misread British character. Only by some such eager and compelling calculation would it seem possible to explain Germany's utter neglect of the extra-European reactions of the new Pact. That she should take delight in affronting Britain and France at the height of their Staff conversations in Moscow, was thoroughly in keeping with Nazi mentality. But the full success of the *coup* depended on their administering an equal affront to their Far Eastern ally, Japan; for the new Pact is of course incompatible with

the Anti-Comintern Pact which Japan signed with Germany in November 1936. It automatically frees Russia's hands in the Far East, and increases the dangers of Japan's vast adventure in China. In the Japanese Press there is already inspired comment on the 'clean slate' which it will be necessary to adopt in foreign policy, and annoyance in Tokio is intense. It would be the height of folly to suppose that Japan will at once abandon her dreams of conquest or even show a more friendly face towards Britain, and there can be no question of our imitating Germany by some extravagant offer to Japan at the expense of China. But it may reasonably be supposed that what has happened will diminish the danger of any extension of conflict in the Far East. It is almost likely to affect the attitude of the United States, which was perhaps unduly critical of our negative policy, but was certainly, as a result of it, drawing slowly nearer to Russia. So far as European policy is concerned, it is certain that American opinion approves the Peace Front, as the best hope of averting war. It is therefore likely to be correspondingly resentful of Russia taking a step which reduces the chance of establishing a Peace Front strong enough to serve as a deterrent to war.

At this stage it would be natural to analyse Russian motives, were they not shrouded in such profound mystery. It has already been pointed out (pp. 255-9) that our more than reserved attitude towards Russia at the time of the Anschluss, and again during the Munich crisis, to a lesser degree even after the Prague *coup*, caused great offence and some suspicion at Moscow. It may be that our delay in responding to Mr. Litvinov's proposals in March and April contributed towards his fall, and that our failure to send a Cabinet Minister, or a diplomat of the first rank, was

misinterpreted. It is certain that Moscow statesmen, just because of their lack of contacts with the West, are very susceptible, and prone to lend credence to whispered suggestions from Berlin. The statesmen, who surrendered at Munich, it was doubtless argued, were incurably decadent and could be relied upon to give way at a moment of crisis: all they were manoeuvring for was some commitment which would involve Russia and Germany in a major conflict, while they played the role of *tertius gaudens*. But what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and the Western Powers, after being treated with such discourtesy (a sterner word might be used), could hardly be blamed for suspecting that Russia wishes to provoke a German-Polish war, which would involve the West also, and that she herself could look on while Europe tore itself to pieces and then emerge as arbiter in the final peace—perhaps even able to impose some form of Bolshevism upon the rest of Europe. They are all the more entitled to be suspicious, because the published text of the new Pact contains no ‘Escape Clause’,<sup>1</sup> though this has hitherto been regarded as a specifically Soviet contrivance.

Another still more sinister interpretation of this latest Pact is that it is a plan for the re-partition of Poland—Germany resuming her old frontiers, Russia seizing the Ukrainian and White Russian districts, and the post-war Republic being reduced to the mangled, landlocked position of ‘Congress Poland’ a century ago under foreign suzerainty. It is not, however, easy to believe that this would really coincide with Russia’s interests, since it would make a much aggrandized Germany once more the neighbour of Russia, while at

<sup>1</sup> i.e. a clause dispensing the one party from action in the event of aggression by the other against a third party.

the same time assuring a German hegemony over all the Danubian and Balkan countries. It is quite true that joint pressure applied by Germany and Russia to Poland would be irresistible, and that the Western Powers could not hope to prevent or reverse it, if the two former were to revert to the methods of Frederick and Catherine, with Maria Theresa eliminated.

Yet another version is that Russia would not be averse to take revenge upon Poland for her own defeat in the war of 1920, by reducing her to appeal for Russian intervention and to pay for her bare survival by the cession of her easterly and non-Polish provinces.

Much more probable, however, is the view that Russia's main desire is to maintain peace, in order to pursue her great internal experiment, and that before committing herself finally to any intervention, she wants to test to the uttermost the reactions of possible allies. If the German insinuations about British and French degeneracy be true, Russia is wise to avoid any entangling alliance with them. But for them there is only one way of restoring confidence—namely, by taking a firm stand in defence of our undertakings. It was a sure instinct of the British nation, that it at once reacted in this sense. In Lord Halifax's words, 'It is not the British way to go back upon obligations.' But in reality, no other choice remained: for the German Press was already extending the original demand for Danzig and a connecting strip of land, to include all the territory that Poland had recovered from Germany in the Great War. Just as the loss of Sudetenland led logically to the conquest of all Bohemia, so the loss of Danzig and the Corridor would be followed by the extinction of Polish independence; and the same process would be applied to Hungary,

Roumania and Jugoslavia in the name of the German cultural minorities within their borders. To quote Lord Halifax once more, 'there must be some certainty about the future of Europe, and that is why we feel obliged to resist attempts to alter the map of Europe by constant appeals to force'. (24 August 1939.)

There remains a wide field of speculation as to the internal reactions both in Germany and in Russia. For years past, year in year out, mutual denunciations of the most fiery and scurrilous kind have been exchanged between Moscow and Berlin, each affecting to regard the other as the enemy of mankind; and in that faith a new generation has been consciously educated. It is not possible, by the sudden turning of a switch, to wipe out these memories, and bewilderment or puzzled cynicism is bound to be the mood of large portions of the population. The most that may safely be affirmed is that no wise statesman will plunge his nation into a life and death struggle while such a mood prevails. And though it is impossible to dwell upon the details here, it must be borne in mind that the conclusion of the Pact will have caused acute discomfort and confusion of thought both on the Right and on the Left, in Spain no less than in Jugoslavia, in Turkey no less than in Hungary, in Greece or Portugal no less than in the Low countries or Scandinavia.

(In Britain, at any rate, this fresh blow, and the welcome firmness displayed by the Government, has rallied the whole nation.) Indeed, it is probably true that no British Government has ever faced imminent danger of war with so unanimous a country behind it. The opposition leaders made it clear that they did not 'withdraw one jot of the criticism levelled against the Government's policy in the past', but that this was

'no time for controversy and still less for recrimination'. It is on this note that I, too, would close a survey which goes to press while the issue of war or peace hangs in the balance. The country has already shown that 'we are not of those that shrink back unto perdition' .

## APPENDIX

### *The Czech Reply of 20 September*

as the British and French Governments have not had the common fairness to publish the very able Czechoslovak Reply to their ultimatum of 18 September, and as in argument, as in all else, the dice are still weighted against Prague, it seems to me only fair to publish the full text without further delay.

The Czechoslovak Government thank the Governments of Great Britain and France for the communication in which they have formulated their point of view on the solution of the present international difficulties regarding Czechoslovakia. Conscious of their responsibility, which has in view the interests of Czechoslovakia, the interests of its friends and allies, as well as the interests of universal peace, they express their conviction that the suggestions put forward in that communication cannot achieve the aim pursued by the Governments of Great Britain and France in their great efforts for peace.

These suggestions have been drafted without previous consultation with the representatives of Czechoslovakia, and a point of view has been adopted against Czechoslovakia without her opinion having been heard, although the Czechoslovak Government have drawn attention to the fact that they would not be able to accept the responsibility for a decision taken without her participation. In consequence it is comprehensible that the suggestions mentioned above could not have been drafted in such a way as to take into just consideration the possibilities of Czechoslovakia.

In fact, the Czechoslovak Government have not even the possibility, from the point of view of the Constitution, to take a decision concerning the frontiers of the State. Such a decision would not be possible to-day without affecting the democratic régime of the country and its juridical system. In any case Parliament would have to be consulted.

In the opinion of the Government the acceptance of a scheme of this nature would be tantamount to mutilation of the State in every respect. The economic life and communication system of Czechoslovakia would be completely paralysed, and strategically she would find herself in an extremely difficult position. Above all, she would very quickly come under the absolute influence of Germany.

Even if the Czechoslovak Government were resigned to acquiesce to the proposed sacrifices, this acceptance would constitute no solution whatever of the problem of peace:

- (a) Numerous Sudeten Germans would prefer, for well-known reasons, the new border districts of the Reich to establish themselves in the democratic atmosphere of the Czechoslovak State: otherwise a new nationality conflict would be the immediate result of it;
- (b) The paralysation of Czechoslovakia would involve in Central and Southern Europe such a profound political change, that the balance of power in Central Europe and Europe in general would be destroyed. Immediate consequences for all other States, and especially for France, would be the inevitable result;
- (c) The Czechoslovak Government are very grateful to Great Britain for her intention to guarantee the integrity of Czechoslovakia, an intention which they value and appreciate highly. Such a guarantee would certainly open the way to an understanding between all the interested parties if the present nationality conflict were to be settled amicably without imposing unacceptable sacrifices upon Czechoslovakia.

In the course of the last few years, Czechoslovakia has given numerous proofs of her unswerving devotion to the cause of peace. Upon the repeated insistence of her friends the Czechoslovak Government, on the occasion of the negotiations on the Sudeten German questions, went so far that her attitude has been recognized and approved by the whole world. Even a declaration of the British Government underlined the fact



that a solution should be found within the frame of the Czechoslovak Constitution, and the Sudeten German Party themselves, when presented with the last proposals of the Government, did not reject them, but openly proclaimed their conviction that these proposals were inspired by serious and sincere intentions. In spite of the riots on the part of a section of the Sudeten German population which have been provoked from outside, the Government solemnly declared that they would maintain the proposals put forward to meet the wishes of the Sudeten German population. The Government consider that it is still possible to adopt this line of action with regard to the settlement of the nationality problems of the Republic.

Czechoslovakia has always remained faithful to treaties and has always fulfilled her obligations resulting from them towards her friends, the League of Nations, its members and other nations. Czechoslovakia has been and will always be prepared to honour these obligations under all circumstances.

If Czechoslovakia defends herself against the possibility of violence, she does so, relying upon obligations but recently given, and upon the declaration of her neighbour, as well as upon the Arbitration Treaty of the 16th October, 1926, which has been recognized by several declarations of the German Government as being still in force.

The Czechoslovak Government underline the possibility of applying this Treaty and demand its application. Committed by their signature, they are prepared to accept that a decision be arrived at by way of arbitration. Conflict of any nature could be thus warded off. This would permit a rapid solution compatible with the honour and the dignity of all the interested States.

There has always been between Czechoslovakia and France a bond of respect and most devout friendship, as well as an alliance which no Czechoslovak Government and no Czechoslovak citizen will ever fail to honour. Czechoslovakia always had and continues to have faith in the great French nation by whose Government she has been assured so often of the solidity of its friendship. Czechoslovakia is linked with Great Britain by traditional attachment and friendship, by the respect and

esteem which has always imbued Czechoslovakia in the indissoluble co-operation between the two countries and their common efforts for peace, whatever the conditions in Europe.

The Czechoslovak Government realize that the efforts made by Great Britain and France are prompted by real interest. For these efforts the Czechoslovak Government express their sincere thanks; but for reasons already stated, they make to Great Britain and France a new supreme appeal and beg them to reconsider their attitude. In doing this they believe that they serve not only their own interests but also the interests of their friends, the interests of peace and of the free evolution of Europe. In this decisive moment it is not only the fate of the Czechoslovak State which is at stake but also that of other countries and, above all, of France.

PRAHA,

*20th September, 1938*

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